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Love And Violence Rule The Frontier

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# Tempered BLADE

A flaming novel of the bitter fight for Texas that ended at the Alamo

Special abridged edition

MONTE BARRETT

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A NOVEL OF OLD TEXAS

# TEMPERED BLADE

MONTE BARRETT

Abridged Edition

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This book has been
slightly abridged for
your reading pleasure

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published in August, 1950

*A keyed map of the Alamo*
*Mission appears at the*
*back of this book*

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# 1

## *Leather Breeches*

IF IT hadn't been for her leather breeches Jim probably wouldn't have given Sybil Cade a second look. She was slender but he noticed the molding of her body, soft and subtly rounded, instead of lean and flat like a boy's. He had never seen a girl in trousers before.

They had been resting, she and her father, and he had reverted to his usual threadbare recollection, the Battle of New Orleans.

"What does Gen'ral Jackson look like, Paw? Tell me 'bout his uniform with the gold buttons."

"Consarn it, gal, what do the buttons matter? I'm a-tellin' ye how we whupped the British." He broke off abruptly, as he peered through the midday gloom of the forest. "Someone's comin'," he commented. He recognized the newcomer and settled comfortably on a stump to visit. "It's Jim Bowie," he announced. "We'll rest a spell and pass the time o' day."

There was a stubborn jut to Sybil's jaw. Her eyes were unfriendly as she watched Bowie approach. His height was not noticeable until he stood towering over her father. It's because his shoulders are so wide, she thought. Except for the strength they suggested, he looked almost effeminate. She resented his manner, too. Its carelessness reflected his opinion of the Cades.

Jim had never noticed her before. It was the leather trousers that made him look twice and he was surprised to find her pretty, despite the stormy eyes. They were large eyes, and dark. He liked that, and the willful curve of lips. He read the truculence in her face and halted his sentence.

"I see you've got——" he had begun. It was in his mind to say, ". . . a boy after all." That was a jest of the neighborhood. Even in offspring Shad Cade was a failure. He

made no secret of the fact he wanted sons. Instead he fathered a numerous brood of girls. "Someone to help you," he finished lamely, and made an excuse to move along. He glanced back only once.

One of them Cades, was Sybil's bitter thought as she watched the intruder leave. That's what he's thinkin'. He'll spread word that I go round wearin' breeches.

Often that week she brooded over the jeers Jim Bowie's story would provoke. Her first instinct was to remain more aloof than ever. What did it matter what was said of her? She did care, however, and in her mind a plan was forming. This was a lonely frontier; often a week passed without a visitor. But Sundays were different. Then neighbors gathered; sometimes they wrestled, again they shot at a mark. Shad sometimes went but she always had shunned these meetings. Now she was determined to go.

Jim noticed her dimity frock. Remembering her in buckskins, he found the change startling. She seemed not to notice him, but later during a wrestling bout he found her standing at his elbow.

"You didn't tell anyone?" she challenged.

"Tell them what?"

"About me wearing breeches."

"Shucks, that's nothing to talk about," he said. "It's just common sense to dress that way in the woods. Besides," he added with a twinkle, "you look good in them."

She blushed, and he thought her lovely. After that she came regularly to the Sunday holidays. The first time she had watched him with malice. Later there was curiosity in her eyes as she followed his movements. She hadn't thought of him as a friend before, yet she regarded him that way now. She knew Jim liked her, too. At each meeting he found opportunity to be alone with her. They were brief moments, little was said. Afterward, she treasured the memory through the long week, remembering the look in his eyes, the sound of his laugh. She was waiting for his love long before he told her of it. That was when they first walked home together.

It happened on an April Sunday. It was the day he rode an alligator at Pierre Fouque's. It was a feat he'd often practiced in private. He'd started roping alligators for practice, and that had suggested the sport. He'd been ducked more than once before he discovered the knack of it. Once he was on the gator's back, the trick was to grasp the upper jaw firmly and gouge his thumbs into the eyes. Then the big reptile couldn't see to do much and the leverage on his jaws would keep him from ducking under water with the rider. Jim hadn't intended to show off, but the neighbors had scoffed when he told them how easy it was. After that there was nothing to do but prove it. He was a little surprised at their awe. He didn't regard it as particularly dangerous. You had only to avoid the gator's flailing tail and it was safe enough. What risk there was gave it zest. He'd borrowed Pierre's leather breeches, sparing his Sunday best, and emerged from his bath in the bayou wet and laughing, his pulse racing pleasantly. Adventure always stirred him so.

Perhaps that was what gave him courage to ask Sybil to share the long walk home. "What's your haste, Sybil?" he asked when she started to slip off alone as usual. "I'm going your way. Won't you wait for me?"

"All right—if you want."

Their awkwardness together was gone. Nor was he troubled by the half-friendly, half-sly glances that followed them into the woods. Their slow-ripening understanding had reached beyond a consciousness of others. He tried to tell her that, but the words were hard to find. Instead, he took her in his arms. Her body was unbelievably soft.

"Why do you close your eyes when I kiss you?" Jim inquired.

"I don't know" and then in a burst of sudden truth—"maybe I don't want you to see what's in them."

He cupped Sybil's chin and tilted back her head, trying to read her face. He could see only the shadow of dark lashes against her cheeks and he felt baffled, as if by closing her lids she had shut him out. She didn't try to break the gentle grip of his fingers.

"Why won't you look at me?"

She kissed him. Then, her cheek burrowed against his, her eyes still guarded against his prying, she confessed.

"I love you too much. You could see it. It makes me feel so—so bare."

He laughed at her but deep within him was a warm spring of understanding. He grew silent and a little solemn; his hold on her relaxed. "Too much?" He weighed the thought of that. "I wonder. Maybe we're just discovering how big love can be. I feel the same way about you. No, there can never be too much of love."

"Not if you feel it too. Then I won't care."

She felt the trembling of his hands as he took her by the shoulders, and was glad. She was hurt a little by the strength of his arms.

She didn't wince. She savored the hard feel of him and twisted her body until the bite of his grip bruised her more. There was sharp reality in this when everything else was confused.

There was no stopping after that. Each new caress was a part of the miracle of their discovery. Their couch was a grassy bank.

Later she watched how the red dusk bronzed his chestnut hair, and she brushed it back in lazy delight.

"I'll build another room on the cabin," he promised. "Next year I'll have the new field cleared and you—you won't have any hoeing to do. No, nor any more sawing wood, either."

She leaned forward to kiss him.

"Do we have to stay here?" she asked, and laughed when he misinterpreted her remark. "I don't mean now, though it soon will be dark. I'm thinking about the years ahead, Jim. I'm not sure I want to live on Bayou Boeuf."

He had never questioned the future before. He had thought of it, he had plans. There was no room for doubt when he looked ahead. The land was good. He was strong. Already he had two rich fields to the plow. Neighbors were beginning to crowd the country with their industry. Why, Louisiana had been a state only since 1812. Much had

been accomplished in those four years. Soon it would be a land of prospering farms and none better than his. He tried to tell her this.

"I know farms," she said. "I want something better for you and me, Jim."

"What is there better? A man's his own master on a farm."

"There's the city. I hear the houses have board floors in them, and some are even built of brick. And the people wear fine clothes every day in the week, not just on Sunday like we do."

"What would I be doing in a city?" Jim demanded. "Work for some shopkeeper? That's not for me. I'll always be my own man."

She tried to explain while she was lying in his arms. Long ago she had determined that this was the path of her escape. They almost quarreled over it.

"Perhaps you'd rather marry a city man," he blurted impatiently. "What's got into you, Sybil? I'm a country man, just like my father before me. I won't be changed. If you can't take me as I am——"

She stopped him with a kiss, pulling his head down to hers, holding him tightly. His outburst frightened her. "It's you I want, Jim, only——"

"Only! There you go again." But he laughed gently. Her caress had coaxed the rebellion out of him.

# 2

## *Wedding Night*

JIM BOWIE visited his family near Opelousas. "I'll be back in two weeks," he promised Sybil before he left. She clung to him that last night, delayed their parting as she thought of the empty days ahead. There was more to her uneasiness than just his absence. More and more their discussions of the future had ended in argument.

Jim had been gone a week when it came time for Shad to raft his lumber to New Orleans. Sybil begged to go, but her father wanted no girl on his hands, and one of the Fouque boys had promised to help. At the last minute he broke his leg.

"Now I'll have to go," Sybil declared triumphantly. "You can't handle the raft alone."

"A fine picture you'd make in the city," her mother snorted. "You an' yore leather breeches."

Sybil had that planned. She would take her best clothing along in the battered old trunk. Her father rejected this.

"An' tote it all the way back afoot? Are you plumb daft?"

"I'll carry it in a bundle then," she promised. "I'm not going to walk around New Orleans dressed like a boy."

Sybil was sick the morning before they left. She didn't understand it, and her chief concern was to hide it from her father in order not to miss the trip. It was the same the next day but by then they were safely on their way. Shad let the raft drift and tried to help her. "I knowed it warn't a good idee fetchin' a gal along," he said, with some concern.

"I'll be all right after a bit," she promised.

Otherwise the trip was without event until they approached New Orleans. Twice steamboats passed, pouring smoke from their twin stacks. To anyone watching from their decks Sybil appeared a lithe boy, barefoot, wearing

only the leather breeches and loose shirt of the frontier. She didn't mind, but she was determined to change before they reached the city.

"Female gawgaws!" her father snorted derisively.

"Just the same I'm not going to New Orleans in this outfit," she replied. "Tell me when it's time to change, Paw."

"If you're sot on it, you'd best do it now," he finally warned. "The town's round this bend or the next. I ain't rightly sure which."

There was no privacy but they had the river to themselves. Shad obligingly turned his back while she made her preparations. Kneeling at the water's edge, she peeled off the shirt and gave herself a scrubbing. From the bundle beside her she pulled out her Sunday dress so carefully hoarded for this moment. Changing costumes in mid-river was something of a feat. Her old costume was only half discarded as, standing, she pulled the dress carefully over her head. Her eyes still were blinded by the smothering folds when she was startled by the throaty whistle of another steamboat nosing around the bend behind them. With a final wriggle she freed her head and turned to face the approaching boat.

"Look ye thar," a voice called. "What is it?"

"Half boy, half girl." The taunting answer came clear across the narrow space. Sybil stared down in dismay. The skirt had caught on her hips, revealing the leather breeches below.

"Damn it! Shut up," a stern voice interposed. "By Jorry, she's just a chit and I'll not have her plagued."

She looked up then in time to see her champion. He wore a white beaver and a crimson coat. In other circumstances his finery would have dazzled her. Now, flustered, she dared not meet his gaze.

Sybil's first glimpse of New Orleans was disappointing. They saw first the new part of the town called the American Colony, sprawled into the outlying fields. Shad knew his way. "We'll never find a mooring below," he warned. Together they worked the raft inshore among half a dozen other log craft, where willing frontiersmen lent help in mak-

ing it fast. To her impatience, Sybil was left to guard the cargo while Shad went to find a buyer. It wasn't a long wait. Lumber was needed in the spreading town and a bargain was quickly struck.

They came at last to the lichened walls of the old city. Streets came crowding through several torn breaches, giving glimpses of houses that stood in ranks, shoulder to shoulder, with jostling roofs. They kept to the water front following the Rue de la Levée, to the Place d'Armes where, facing the river, stood the cathedral with twin, domed towers, flanked on the right by the Presbytère and on the left by the Hotel de Ville. Their destination lay three squares beyond, the Hotel de la Marine, still on the Rue de la Levée. This section was crowded with inns, but Turpin's Marine was most popular with back-country visitors.

Shad regarded Sybil as a liability now. His visits to the city were rare and he had brought a thirst along. "You wait here," he ordered. "This is no place fer a gal to go traipsin' round the streets alone."

She turned stormy. "I didn't come here to be penned in a room. Why do you think I wore my best dress? I'm going with you."

Eventually a compromise was reached. She might go alone but she must be back before sundown. "No tellin' what might happen to ye after dark," he admonished.

Sybil ventured forth. In mid-town the Rue de la Levée skirted the water but here the river curved outward, leaving space across the street for a public market, bustling with industry. She paused, fascinated by the hubbub. But here were none of the silks and satins she had come to see, and her curiosity was quickly satisfied. She passed a neighboring tavern, Le Veau-qui-Tête. This was a place of more fashion. She paused to watch as two men came swinging out. The first strode quickly toward a waiting carriage. It was the second she watched with wonder. His coat was of plum-colored velvet, his breeches of lemon broadcloth were skin-tight and his hat was white beaver. He carried a long, gold-mounted stick under his arm as he pulled on yellow gloves. It was the lace which astonished her most. There

was a white shower of it at his throat and more dangling at his cuffs. She was so engrossed in these details that she had no time for the man himself until he bowed, sweeping off his hat with a flourish.

He was swarthy, his jet hair gleamed smoothly, small button eyes twinkled darkly.

"It's the lady of the raft," he said, "but she's lost her leather breeches."

"Oh, let her alone, Jacques. Can't you see she's only a chit?" his companion intervened.

"And a damned pretty one, too," Jacques responded. "Don't run away, my dear."

She felt his hand on her sleeve. He could no longer be ignored. With swift impulse she slapped him stingingly across the cheek.

"Well done!" Jacques's companion broke into peals of laughter. "By Jorry, it served him right, miss. He asked for it."

Jacques had dropped his cane. He stood clutching his cheek, staring at her in astonishment. Sybil turned to run, but a firm hand checked her. She tried to shake free, tore at the strong fingers.

"Let go," she choked, twisting helplessly. "Let go, or I'll —I'll——"

"Damn your eyes, Jacques. You've scared the child half out of her wits," her captor said.

"I'm no child," Sybil flared. "I'm a w-w-woman."

"And a very charming one." Jacques bowed again. He hadn't anticipated this stormy climax to a careless pleasantry, and he liked the appearance of this girl. "We must make amends, Henri. We'll take the lady in our carriage." And then to Sybil, "I am Jacques LaTour, mademoiselle. A very regretful Jacques because I caused you embarrassment, but now we shall be friends."

He introduced his companion, Henri Bertin. Sybil was prepared to like Henri. He was the man in the crimson coat who had championed her once before. She was startled to see that he had but one eye, of a friendly blue, set in a crinkled, ruddy face. The lid of the other was sewed flat over

the empty socket. He carried two sheathed rapiers under his arm.

"Of course, we'll take you wherever you're going." He supported his friend's invitation.

"But I'm not going anywhere. I mean—I'm just visiting. I only intend to walk around and see the city."

Henri Bertin's strong hand was under her elbow. "You're going to see the city," he promised. "Come along. Jacques owes you a grand tour."

Sybil let herself be guided toward the carriage. The splendor of her companions overwhelmed her at first, but the strangeness quickly wore away under the spell of Jacques's gaiety. Henri was just as affable but more restrained. They showed her the famous coffeehouses, Pontalba's and the newly completed Perrilliat's Inn. On the Rue d'Orléans they halted to stare at the magnificence of the Théâtre d'Orléans to be opened in another month.

"It's the first theater I've ever seen," Sybil confessed.

"Tonight you shall attend one," Jacques promised on impulse. "There's an Opéra Comique at the St. Philip's."

"Like this?" Sybil stared at her printed muslin frock.

Jacques hesitated briefly. "I'll attend to that," he promised.

She colored. "You mean you want to buy me a dress?"

"None of your tricks, Jacques. Not with our little friend." Henri looked uncomfortable.

"I've changed my mind. I don't want to see the opera," Sybil declared.

"You wouldn't go even if you had a pretty dress?" Jacques asked.

"Maybe. But I haven't. And I'm not taking charity from anyone."

"Who said anything about a gift?" Jacques looked incredulous. "I thought—since you'd never been to a theater —we might borrow one just for tonight. Where's the harm in that?"

"Borrow?" This was different. "I guess I didn't understand."

Jacques made everything seem easy. "We'll see if

Madame Veillon has anything suitable," he said when they reached a shop on the Rue de Condé. He went in, leaving her waiting with Henri.

Inside, Jacques was interviewing Madame Veillon.

"I have just finished a dress for Madame Ravel," she admitted. "It's exquisite and of the latest fashion, but she——"

Jacques inspected the dress. "It will do."

"But Madame Ravel!"

"You can make her another." The money he handed her stilled her protests. "And remember what I told you. The girl thinks it's a loan." Jacques called the others in. "It's all arranged. I've found just the dress, if only it's the right size."

"It will fit," the proprietress promised, leading Sybil to a dim back fitting room. The girl caressed the satin in delight.

"How much is it?" The question seemed guileless.

Madame Veillon saw through the ruse. "*Eh bien!* What a cautious little cabbage you are," she chuckled. "The dress isn't for sale, mademoiselle. Just for this one night, I am lending it to my good friend Jacques LaTour." Her final "Take good care of it, *chérie*. I want it back like new" was most convincing of all. Sybil's doubts vanished.

They carried the costume—and the petticoats, gloves and slippers that went with it—to Jacques's house. They had debated this. Sybil first insisted on returning to the Hotel de la Marine to change. It wasn't Jacques's argument which swayed her but thought of her father. If he returned how could she explain this finery? Would he let her go out again? She doubted it strongly.

It was Henri's assurance which decided her finally. "It's all right," he said. "I'll go along and we'll all have dinner there before the theater."

The house was another miracle to her. It was on the Rue Conti, plastered brick like its neighbors but larger, two-and-a-half stories tall. A burly-shouldered Negro admitted them.

"Two guests for dinner, Dace," Jacques announced as they entered a wide arched passage that led to a flowering patio. The main house occupied the street front, with an ell along one side. "Tell Midge I expect something extra. This is a special occasion."

Sybil stared about her in wonder. "It's so big," she exclaimed. "You must have a very large family."

Both men laughed heartily when Jacques told her he was a bachelor. "This is my 'office.' " He led her into the one great room across the front. Foils hung upon the walls.

Henri explained. Jacques was a fencing master. "This is where he instructs his pupils. The living quarters are upstairs."

They reached the upper level from a staircase in the patio. Black Dace was sent to prepare a room for Sybil.

"Tell Midge she'll need a tub of hot water, and send Frankie to help her."

Sybil clutched her bundles tightly. "I can dress myself, thank you."

Jacques stared. "Nonsense. You'll need someone."

"But Frankie——"

"Frankie is a black wench," Henri explained. "It's all right."

Sybil thought it a strange place where the girls even wore boys' names.

The Opéra Comique was entirely in French and Sybil understood not a word. But if the play was a disappointment, the theater was not. She was dazzled by its magnificence. In addition to the main auditorium there was a parquet and two rows of boxes. They were in the second row where she could stare about at will. The place was filled with women in silks and satins, the men in broadcloth and velvet, but none, she thought, as splendid as Jacques beside her.

Greatest of all satisfactions was the knowledge that many men, and women too, were aware of her presence. It was as warming to her mind as the suave texture of the satin gown was to her body. She had never known such a sense of well-being.

"There's no one here half so lovely as you," Jacques murmured.

She smiled back as he squeezed her hand. She kept shutting out the knowledge that soon all this would end.

Shad had forgotten Sybil. He had dismissed her from his mind when he closed the door after him at the tavern, and the quantities of rum he had consumed since hadn't added to his sense of responsibility. As he lurched along, he paid scant attention to the sudden flood of swells emptying from the theater. He was too engrossed in the tale he was telling his companion. He stared uncertainly when he first saw her. His vision had grown a little blurred.

"That looks like my gal," he declared.

"Why, it's Paw." She halted in surprise.

He blinked solemnly. He must be drunk. Seein' things. Syb was safe in bed hours ago, and no gal of his had ever even seen such female doodads. Wrath came with clearing vision.

It was Sybil all right. He stared with suspicion at the finery of her two escorts. There could be but one answer to all this.

"What you doin' here?" he barked. "Git home, you—you——"

He stuttered over the epithet and never had a chance to mouth it. A one-eyed man caught him by the shoulder and hustled him through the crowd.

"Nothing's happened to your daughter," the stranger warned. "Make another suggestion like that and I'll carve out your gizzard."

"We can't talk here," Jacques cut in. "Let's go on to my house."

"Not me." Shad squared himself against a wall to keep from swaying. "I'm takin' my gal home." He stared at her white dress. "Whar's yore clothes?"

"At his house. I'll have to go back there for them."

He grunted. "I might 'a' knowed."

"Come on. We're just wasting time here." Jacques took Sybil's arm.

Shad settled back against the wall. "I won't set foot in that house."

"But, Paw, I can't go back like this."

He wrestled uncertainly with his decision. "Go git yore clothes," he yielded finally. "An' hustle back to th inn. I'll be waitin' fer ye."

"We'll bring her back," said Henri gruffly.

Dace was drowsing at the gate waiting for them. A supper table was laid in the patio.

"I planned a party." Jacques stared wryly at the table.

"I'm sorry. I'll have to go now." Sybil lingered, though. "It's been wonderful," she said finally. "I'm sorry it had to end like this."

"It needn't." Jacques picked a bottle from its cradle and pulled the loosened cork. "At least we can have a glass of wine together."

"A stirrup cup," Henri agreed.

"What's that?"

"A sort of farewell glass to speed the parting guest."

Sybil watched the liquid catch the candlelight as Jacques poured.

"Here's to a happy day!" Henri raised his glass.

"To us!" amended Jacques, meeting Sybil's eye.

She raised her glass in imitation and caught the wine's fragrance.

"Better change your dress, Sybil," said Henri. "I'll tell Dace to harness up. We'll drive you back, of course."

His footsteps echoed across the patio. Jacques didn't move.

"You needn't go, you know." He was refilling their glasses.

"I must. As soon as I change. Paw will be waiting."

"You're very beautiful, Sybil. I hate to think of giving you up." He handed her a glass. "This time we'll drink just to you and me."

The wine was sweet. She drank it all. "Now I must change. I'll leave this dress on the bed."

He frowned. "It's yours. Take it with you."

"You know I can't do that, but thanks for wanting me to

have it." Then, while her resolve was still fresh, she fled up the stairs.

Sybil lingered over the change, staring into the mirror with longing. It was time to go and still she hesitated. Once the dress was gone she would put this world behind her and she wanted to postpone the break. At last she turned her back on the mirror. It had to end sometime. Her brows were drawn into a pucker as she loosed the bodice and let the dress slide from her shoulders. She was standing there in her petticoats, the dress in snowy folds about her ankles when Jacques entered.

"You see it wasn't just the dress." He stared approvingly. "You're even lovelier now."

She was startled.

"Don't be afraid. I had to see you again." He stood there, waiting.

"I'm not afraid," she replied simply.

"Then why are you leaving me?"

"What else is there to do?" She was a little bewildered by his question.

"Ah, Sybil, Sybil——" With three swift strides he had her in his arms. "Can't you tell how I want you? I can't let you leave."

For a moment she was passive until his kisses stirred an answering ardor. Then her arms slipped around his neck.

Henri's approach seemed purposely noisy. His heels clattered in the empty hall. Embarrassed, Sybil tried to pull away.

"The carriage is ready." Henri's eye missed no detail of the scene. "Come on, Jacques. Give her a chance to dress."

"She isn't going."

"I told her father I'd bring her back."

"Then go and tell him you've changed your mind."

"But *I* haven't." Henri stepped into the room. "She's only a child and she's partly my responsibility. I won't stand by and let things go wrong."

Jacques's eyes narrowed. "You think you can stop me?"

"You know I can." The answer was quick, harsh.

Jacques ignored Henri's challenge. Instead he laughed.

"Damn it, Henri. You can't object if I want to marry the girl."

"By Jorry!" Henri turned his single searching eye from one to the other. His lips pursed into a silent whistle. "What about it, Sybil?" he asked finally.

She was hunting words. Events crowded her too fast and yet this climax fitted into the astonishing pattern of the entire day. Even Jim Bowie was forgotten now.

"I don't know what to say." She sounded almost frightened.

"I know the answer." Jacques gripped her shoulder. When his lips touched hers the answering embrace was fervent. That decided the watching Henri.

"Help her with that dress, Jacques. We're going to find a priest."

"Why don't you get him? We'll wait here," Jacques temporized.

"Not me. You might change your mind. The carriage is waiting. We'll all go together." It was Henri, too, who insisted on picking up Shad. "It's proper. Her father ought to be there."

"What if he objects?"

"Leave that to me." Henri grinned. "Nothing's going to stop this wedding now."

He met each new obstacle with stubborn insistence. To the sleepy priest he said, "But, Father, if they are leaving on a journey they must have the blessing of the church."

Shad was easier to convince than the cleric. To him it seemed a great match. Henri never left their side until he escorted them back to their door, the ceremony completed.

"Aren't you going to ask me in to drink the bride's health?" he demanded finally.

"Go to hell!" said Jacques, shoving him through the gate. "You've done enough for one night."

Jacques led Sybil up the stairs.

# 3

## *The Campeachy Pirates*

SHAD CADE went back to Bayou Boeuf alone. When Jim Bowie returned he hurried over to see Sybil and heard the story from Shad himself.

"You're lying to me!" he shouted.

"But it's the truth I'm tellin' ye, Jim. She's a grand lady now, all dressed up in silks like nothin' you ever saw. Why, she——"

Bowie waited to hear no more. He lashed out blindly with a blow that sent the surprised Shad rattling against the door. Then wheeling, he strode off through the woods. There was no purpose in his walking, hour on hour. He tramped the night forest, striding savagely as if energy could still the fury of his despair. When at last he reached the homestead in the cold dawn, there was a light in the window. That surprised him. He approached slowly, caught the pungent smell of frying bacon. He reached the door, recognized his brother stooping over the hearth.

"When did you get here?"

"I came last night." Rezin Bowie stared shrewdly at his brother's set face. "What's wrong, Jamie?"

"Everything is for sale, Rez—everything. We're on the wrong track. Only fools build with their hands. The smart ones get hold of money—it doesn't matter how—they know they can buy anything they want."

"Within reason."

"Anything," Jim repeated hotly. "Brick houses, women—"

"Not my kind of women, Jim."

"Any kind of women. Don't be a blind fool."

Rezin's eyes narrowed. "I wonder which of us is blind. I'm thinking of Ma. And of Maggie."

Jim stared at the fire. "I was forgetting your wife," he admitted. "And Ma. They're different, of course." He

turned a clouded face toward his brother. "Maybe that's why I was so easy to fool." Jim's voice was bitter. "I had too much confidence in women's goodness. But I'll not be tricked again. Mind what I'm telling you. Women are as treacherous as snakes and the prettier they are, the worse they are. A man's a fool to put his trust in any of 'em."

"Some are like that. I guess you picked a bad one."

"How can you tell the good from the bad," Jim flared harshly, "if the ones with the warmest lips tell you lies while they're kissing you? Money will buy any of them, and now that I know money's all that matters, I'm going after it. I'm going to make lots of it, Rez. Piles of it."

"Sounds fine," Rezin commented dryly. "Let's put in together if it's as easy as all that."

"Would you, Rez? We'd be partners. Two men can beat one any day. Before we're through whenever people think of money they'll think of the Bowie brothers."

"Fine talk, Jim, but how d'you plan to do all this?"

"We'll start with land. That's what there's the most of—and cheap. This farm will fetch a handsome profit now I have it cleared and crops standing. Buy cheap and sell dear after the land's developed. I've thought it all out. I had to. I need money—lots of money—and quickly."

They discussed it for hours. Rezin was cautious, but in the end he agreed to the partnership.

"What about Maggie?" he asked finally. "She likes our homestead."

"You'll give her a better one—a hundred times better—before we're through. It's for Mag as much as for you. She won't object."

She didn't. "Is it what you want, Rezin?" was her only question.

Jim struck a good bargain in selling his farm. When Rezin's was sold a month later, he was a little dazzled by their pooled resources. "That's just a start," Jim said. "Not a drop in the bucket to what we're going to have. The Bowie brothers are on their way."

They moved to the Bayou Lafourche country for their

next venture. It was in the path of settlement; the land was rich and cheap. Rezin sent Mag to stay with his people until her new home should be ready. This time, instead of developing an ordinary farm, they concentrated on a sugar plantation. "There's more money in cane," Jim said.

Once the land was selected and Jim was sure of his surplus, he made another purchase. This was a field hand named Joe, a sturdy black who cost twelve hundred dollars. There was an urgency behind everything Jim did these days. The days were too short for him.

With three pairs of hands work progressed rapidly. During the fall and winter they felled trees and built their cabin. There was a smokehouse too, and a slave cabin with space in the rear for a sugar mill. "We'll build there when the time comes," he said. Getting the fields in was of first importance. Even so, they spent two years there before the place was ready.

"I wouldn't mind staying here." Rezin looked at the spreading fields. "There's not a better place in this section. We'd prosper here."

"Too slow." The same restlessness drove Jim. "A quick profit's what we want. I've got my eye on a place down the bayou. There's some open land on it. We can clear it quick."

Rezin agreed. This time they found their purchaser in New Orleans. He paid them sixty-five hundred dollars in gold. "It's a start," said Jim.

They were still waiting for the new owners to take over when a visitor arrived. Jess Leeman was a tall, wiry man with skin the color of worn leather and a red scar marring one cheek.

"You old lizard," Jim welcomed him heartily. "Where'd you drop from?"

Jess grinned quizzically from one brother to the other. "How come yore tribe's a-gatherin'? Air ye mixin' up yore war paint?"

Jim explained the partnership. He welcomed Leeman as an old friend. Nearly five years before, he had appeared at Bayou Boeuf at the time young Jim, then eighteen, was first clearing his homestead. With frontier hospitality Jim had

shared his bacon and made a place for the stranger by the fire in the new cabin.

"I reckon ye could use a hand with yore clearin'," Jess had commented. "Thar's a site o' timber hyar."

"I'm figuring on rafting some down the river later. Until then I haven't the money to hire anyone."

"Pshaw, I ain't prospectin' fer wages. I been on the trail quite a spell. It'd do me good to rest up hyar a few days an' make myself handy."

By the time a week passed Jim had known he wanted Jess to stay.

"See here, Jess," he said at last, "if you'll just stay we'll go partners on the raft down the river. That's the only way I can pay you."

"That sounds good," Jess agreed. "I'll pull my weight, Jim."

He pulled more than his weight, and in many ways. There were two knives in his belt, one an ordinary skinning knife such as every trapper carried, the other a hiltless weapon with a tapering blade. "My throwin' knife," he explained. "Some folks think jest any knife is good fer throwin' an' that's whar they're wrong. Balance an' temper is what ye need thar. A grip's jest in the way. Y'see," he explained, "an ordinary blade's likely to snap when it hits, an' balance is what makes the throw, o' course."

Jim spent hours under his tutelage until he learned the trick of it. As their friendship ripened Jess told stories of Texas, of Magee and of the army he had led against the Spaniards there.

"I was thar till the end. Only a handful of us got out after Medina." Once he said, "Bowie? I knowed a man in Texas by that name. He was in Ross's comp'ny. I never seen him after we split up in San Antonio but I reckon he got out with Kemper."

"That was my older brother Rezin. Yes, he came back."

It had been Jess, too, who first taught Jim the use of a lariat in which he later became so proficient.

"I'll larn ye a Texas craft," Jess had said. He braided the rope of rawhide and showed Jim how to throw the noose.

"What is it—an Indian trick?"

"Mexican. An' th'ar tarnation good at it, too."

Jim never forgot the lessons Jess had taught him. He roped wild horses and his reputation for riding netted him an occasional bounty for breaking unmanageable colts in the neighborhood. It was his skill at roping which had eventually led him to tackle alligators for sport.

When they rafted the lumber to New Orleans Jess didn't return. "Reckon I'll drift along, Jim. I'll drop by one o' these days. No tellin' when."

Jim hadn't seen him since. "I'm headin' back fer Texas," he explained now. "Thar's a fight on the fire an' I aim to be thar when it comes to a bile. A feller name o' Long has crossed the border an' is gatherin' a army at Nacogdoches. It's my chancet to even up accounts over yonder."

"I'd like another crack at them myself," said Rezin. "Why don't we go, Jim?"

"Not me." Jim's face was set, stubborn. "We haven't time."

Jess stared. "Time fer what?"

"Business. I'm out for money. Nothing's going to stop me."

"We're developing land," Rezin explained. "Buy it cheap, clear it and set in crops, then take a quick profit."

"Why, if it's land yo're after thar's more of it in Texas than any place in the world. Good land. Nothin' but grass jest waitin' fer a plow. Ye could put in a crop yore fust year."

Jim's eyes grew bright. "Why didn't you tell me about that, Rez?"

"What good would it do? We can't fight the Spaniards—not alone."

"They won't stop us. Not if there's land waiting. Let's go."

Nacogdoches was teeming with volunteers who had crossed the border to join the Long expedition. It was an odd town, half old, half new; the Spaniards had burned the town in vengeance after the Magee expedition in 1813, but

it had refused to die. There were many Mexicans here still, but it had lost its character as a Spanish town. American settlers had brought their bustle with them; it was the landlocked port for the outlaws of the Neutral Ground. It was a center for the Indian trade, too. A dozen savage dialects added to the babble of French, Spanish and English. Long's volunteers added to this confusion. There were three hundred of them, recruited from the States, backwoodsmen from Kentucky and Tennessee, boatmen from the Mississippi, hardy settlers from the Louisiana Purchase country. A republic had been proclaimed with a supreme council of ten and with Long as president. The civil government seemed to be functioning smoothly, but the military organization was loose.

"I don't like it." Jess complained. "Plenty o' good men hyar but whar's the leaders? They've been settin' hyar three months without makin' a move. Magee'd 'a' been in San Antonio by now."

His grumbling attracted comment. One day President Long himself sent for him. He returned jubilant.

"We're through twiddlin' our thumbs," he reported. "Long wanted me 'case he'd hyard I know the country an' he needs a guide to Campeachy. I told him we'd take him thar."

Jim was delighted. They would traverse the land he wanted to explore. That remained his first interest.

Long's errand at Campeachy was urgent. This was the stronghold of Jean Lafitte, notorious pirate, constantly defiant of Spain; if his help could be enlisted Long hoped for a concerted drive to rout the Spaniards from Texas. Indians had just brought word of a strong Spanish force advancing rapidly under Colonel Ignacio Perez.

There were only four men in the party: James Long, the two Bowies and Jess Leeman.

"Now's the time to get Lafitte to join me," Long told his companions. "If he does, we've got 'em. A strong force moving west from Galveston Bay will catch Perez in flank and behind. Not a one will escape."

They rode with new precaution now, and fast, with Jess

ranging far ahead to scout their advance. There were no more leisurely chats. They were too weary. At sundown they stopped to rest and graze the horses. When the moon rose they were in the saddle again, heading south.

In spite of the pace Jim noticed the country. This was the prairie he'd been seeking, undulating hills off to the west and great flat plains stretching southward, the grass a springy turf underfoot.

"This is it," he told Rezin, "the land I've been hunting. All a man needs here is a yoke of oxen and a plow." His brother was too tired to answer.

The last night out Jess redoubled his precautions. "This hyar's Carancahua country. Wust Injuns I know. I'd ruther meet up with Perez' whole army."

They reached the bay without encountering trouble, and soon after they appeared on the beach a boat put out to ferry them across to the island. All of them had heard tales of this place. Lafitte had built his stronghold on Galveston Island where his ships could shelter behind it, in the bay. They were disappointed. Legends had made it sound like a pretentious fort. But there were no fortifications; the place depended upon its island position for strength. Four tall ships rode in the harbor, evidence of the pirate's calling. Near the water's edge were two long stockades built of logs.

"Forts?" Long asked.

"Slavepens," he was told.

Long wrinkled his nose in disgust. He disliked the traffic but he needed Lafitte's help.

They were guided to Lafitte's house at once. Here the pirate leader waited to welcome his distinguished guest. There was nothing about him to indicate his calling. He was a tall, spare man, his complexion dark, his hair sleek, clothing rich in the latest fashion. Jim was familiar with the Louisiana legends concerning him; his heroic part against the British in the Battle of New Orleans was well known. Nevertheless, Jim had come here with considerable prejudice which he found hard to maintain in the pirate's presence.

Lafitte had refreshments awaiting them, but Long was anxious to get to business.

"But you have traveled a long way, monsieur. Surely a conversation that has waited this long may be delayed another hour."

"The Spaniards are on the march," Long insisted sturdily. "If all goes well, we may be able to cut them to pieces in that hour."

Jim backed his chief.

"The food can wait. The rest of us will remain outside until your conference is ended."

The three of them lounged in the shade of the house, welcomed the opportunity to watch the bizarre life of this community. Across the street half a dozen rascals lolled in the shade of a house, rolling dice. As the game progressed one of the players whose luck was poor left the game and returned shortly with a large Negro in tow.

"Worth a hundred and eighty dollars," he said. "A dollar a pound and that's what he weighs."

"The *bos* sells 'em by average weight and that's a hundred and forty," was the retort. "I'll allow you that and no more."

"I won't take a dollar less than a hundred and eighty."

"You'll take what I give you and like it."

A knife flashed. The target for the blade saw it coming and ducked; it thudded into the gallery railing a few feet from where Jim Bowie stood.

The argument stopped. The pirates stared silently at the three men.

"Pay no mind," Jess warned. "They'd like to pick a fight an' we're outnumbered. Best take it easy."

Jim grinned. "It wasn't meant for us." He turned his back on the group.

They took it as a challenge. While Bowie's back was still turned another knife plunked into a post, this time a foot nearer.

"See who can come the closest," someone called.

The third knife was closer still. Jim waited no longer. He pulled out the still quivering blade, balanced it between his fingers.

"Whose is it?" he demanded.

The laughter stopped. A squat man with a shock of yellow hair stepped forward. "It's mine," he said.

Jim still balanced the knife in his slender hand. "Will you come and get it or shall I throw it back?"

"Hah!" The pirate pounded his bare chest. "Listen to de poy. He tries to talk like a man. T'row it. I'll catch it wid my teeth."

Bowie's hand tightened.

"Give me a harder mark."

"Look," the man jeered. "Look who's teachin' Dutch Louie how to t'row." He pointed at a knot on the unpainted house beside him. "All right. Hit dot."

Dutch Louie held up his arm to point and as he did so the knife left Bowie's hand.

The blade thudded into the mark just an inch beyond the pointing finger.

"Well thrown!" cried a voice behind him.

Turning, Jim saw Lafitte.

"You know how to handle a blade, my friend. I could use you here. I hope you'll come back."

"I plan to," Jim Bowie replied. "We could do business, you and I."

# 4

## *The Slavers*

LONG was bitter as they left Campeachy. "A damned pirate, a blackbirder! I should have known better than to expect anything of him."

"He seemed in such high spirits, I thought you'd reached an agreement," Jim remarked.

The president shook his head. "Oh, he's polite enough. Too smooth, maybe. He won't commit himself. Says our army's too small for the job, that we haven't a chance. I tried to make him see what an opportunity we have if he'd join us, but it made no impression. He won't help."

They rode fast. With a Spanish army on the move and Lafitte sitting on the side lines, there was no time to spare. At noon of the third day their jaded horses trotted into the deserted Cochattee village on the Trinity where the army was to have been concentrated. Major Smith with forty men had been stationed here; it had been the site Long had chosen for battle.

"What's happened? Where can they be?"

"I don't know but I reckon I c'n find out right sharp," Jess replied. "C'mon, Jim. You an' me are goin' on a look-see."

There were many tracks, some moderately fresh. These converged into one well-marked trail heading south on the east bank of the river. "A sizable force," said Jess, "but 'twarn't the whole army. It's hard to jedge the size of a big war party, but I'd reckon this'n at better'n a hunderd men."

They followed it for about ten miles, then crossed the river and scouted the west bank on their return. Here they found a wide, careless trail with dozens of diverging paths paralleling it. They didn't even dismount. It was too easy to read. The Spanish army had passed here headed south too.

"I figger Gen'ral Perez must 'a' tried to strike here an' cut this force off," the scout told Long. "Our men headed south with the Spanish on thar tails but thar's still the river between 'em."

"And this wasn't our main army?"

Jess shook his head. "Half of it, maybe. No more."

Nacogdoches was about seventy-five miles northeast. Long decided to hurry there, gather the rest of his troops and lead them south to unite his force. Twenty-four hours later they rode into the town, only to find it abandoned. The scene here was obvious; when Major Hamlin Cook, left in command there, heard of the other disasters he had fled and the terror had been contagious. None had remained behind. "If anybody else has shaky feet, now's the time to start running," Long said grimly.

"Which way are you headed, General?" Jim Bowie asked.

"Smith's falling back from the Cochattee village. We know that. He'll head for Point Bolivar on Galveston Bay. I designated that as a rallying place if anything went wrong. That's where I'm going."

"I reckon we'll tail along," said Jess. "Me, I'm a hard loser, too."

Long and his companions started their hard ride south. Point Bolivar was a long, narrow peninsula thrust thirty miles out into Galveston Bay from the east. Here Long met the remnants of his force. There were one hundred and eighteen men waiting.

"If Lafitte would join us we'd still have a chance," Smith suggested.

"He won't," said Long. "If he didn't think we were strong enough before, he won't raise a finger now."

There was no argument. The leaders recognized their cause was lost. After three days Long started the remnant of his little army eastward on its retreat to the Louisiana border.

"I've decided to stay here," Jim Bowie said.

"You know what will happen if they catch you," Long protested.

"Nobody's going to catch me," Bowie assured him and

turned to Leeman. "You'd better go along with the others, Jess. This is business with us."

"I'm stickin' with my friends," Leeman declared stubbornly.

Rezin objected to the venture when Jim first explained it. "Too many risks," he said. "First pirates, then the Spanish and after you reach Louisiana you're still in an illegal business. And besides all that I've no liking for the trade."

"There's money in it," Jim persisted. "We paid twelve hundred dollars for Joe and slaves are selling for one hundred and forty dollars a head in Campeachy. That's mighty easy arithmetic. I won't try to take 'em across Texas. Lafitte can set 'em down at the mouth of the Sabine River just as easy."

"What if you're caught there? You know the law against importing slaves. They'll be seized as contraband."

Jim grinned. "Yes. I know the law. I'm going to use it. The government sells contraband slaves at auction and whatever they bring, half the price goes as a reward to the informer who called attention to them. I'm going to be the informer."

"Are you daft, Jamie? Smuggling slaves and then telling on yourself?"

"It's still plain arithmetic. If I keep the slaves and they're seized, I've lost everything, but suppose I work it this way. Even if the government auctions 'em off at only a thousand dollars each, my share is five hundred dollars and they only cost me one hundred and forty to begin with. Still a good profit, and from then on there's a legal title goes with the merchandise. I've been figuring this out ever since we met Lafitte and saw his crowded slavepens."

"But why? We're doing all right as we are. It's senseless, taking this risk."

"It's time I'm thinking of. I'm bound to make a fortune, Rez, and I'm going to do it in a hurry. This is the short cut I've been looking for. I'm simply using my skill and my wits. I don't aim to hurt anybody. Then it might be different."

"It isn't exactly a favor you're doing these slaves."

"They're already slaves. They'll be better off in Louisiana than in the hands of those pirates."

"Maybe. But I want no part of it."

"All right, Rez. Good-by."

Rezin hesitated. "You know I can't leave you here alone."

"Don't worry about me. I'll get along."

"Damn it, Jim, we're partners. I don't like this, but if you're so set on it, I won't back out."

Jim thumped him on the back. "That's good. They can't stop the Bowie brothers, Rez. Not as long as we stick together."

Lafitte welcomed them back to Campeachy. "You see how right I was," he shrugged. "Long didn't have a chance and he wouldn't listen when I told him so. But you'll be safe here. I'll set you down on the Louisiana coast by the first ship that sails that way."

"We're not running away." Bowie's denial was quick. "We're here on business. Your pens are crowded with slaves. You need a market. I'm the man who can supply it."

The pirate was pleased. "I knew you were a man to my liking when I saw you throw that knife." There was no argument over price, a dollar a pound was the well-known scale here. Lafitte led the way to one of the barricades and picked his brawniest merchandise. Bowie watched silently until forty had been chosen. Arrangements were made for delivery of the black cargo at the lake at the mouth of the Calcasieu River. "That's thirty miles east of the Sabine, shorter for you and just as easy for me," said Lafitte.

The purchase price was to be paid on delivery. "We don't carry gold in our saddles when we go out fighting," Bowie explained.

The pirate studied him briefly. "In a business like mine gold seals every bargain, but your word is good enough for me. My ship will be there two weeks from today."

"Make it three. We have a lot of ground to cover." They were more than two hundred miles from Opelousas where they'd left their money.

Rezin and Jim made the trip together. Jess volunteered

for the expedition but Jim would have none of it. "Too much risk, Jess."

"I've never run from trouble yit."

"But this isn't your trouble. We're the ones who stand to make the money." Jim refused to change his mind.

The initial trip was without incident. Lafitte himself was aboard the schooner *Blanque* which made the delivery. The cargo cost $5,600 in gold, almost all the profit from the plantation sale.

"If anything goes wrong, we're broke," said Rezin.

"Nothing's going wrong," was the reply.

Rezin rode ahead, breaking a path through the wilderness. Jim trailed behind, his rifle across his saddle, his eyes on the trudging blacks between. They used no ropes except at night; the slaves marched free. Their final camp was twelve miles southwest of Opelousas. Here they parted company, Rezin for the family homestead, Jim for the town after making sure the slaves were secure. "It's best I go alone," he said. "If they see only me, they'll think I couldn't have fetched them by myself."

He notified customs officials that night and led a posse to the camp. According to law, the auction was held the following week. Once they were sold by the government a legal bill of sale accompanied each of the forty slaves. The average price was $960, half of which went to Jim Bowie as the informer. His reward was $19,200, but he bought in six of the cheaper slaves from the profits. When the deal was completed they had more than $13,000 in gold and six more sound field hands. "The Bowie brothers are on their way." Jim always said that when they wound up a deal.

Jim made the next trip alone. They had purchased a new plantation site in Rapides Parish, near Alexandria, and someone was needed there to get things started. With Joe, there were now seven hands to clear the fields. "You're married, Rez. It's best you be the one who stays home. Send for Maggie as soon as the cabin's finished and set up housekeeping. You've been wanting that a long time."

"How about you? It's time you were picking out a girl and settling down. You can afford it now."

Jim's gray eyes turned bleak. This was a subject he didn't discuss, not even with his brother. "That's not for me. I'm doing what I want."

Jim made five trips in all. Their profit totaled more than $100,000.

They named the new plantation Acadia and copied the house after mansions they'd seen at Natchez. It was two stories, two rooms on either side of a wide center hall on each floor, with a kitchen in the rear and a long row of cabins in the slave quarter. They used slave labor for the most part but brought in a few artisans, too. One of these was Jesse Cliffe, a blacksmith, who came to forge the hardware. They built a smithy for him.

A hunter was also employed to provide game for the table. This was a Frenchman named Bougère. One day he came in with a story of wild cattle that had drifted in from the west. "Good," said Jim. "Tomorrow we'll have some fun." That night he oiled the stiffness out of his lariat.

Bougère led them to the scene. He expected to shoot the game but Jim would have none of this. "First chance I've had to do any roping in years," he explained.

When Rezin asked how he planned to kill the animals, he patted the knife in his belt.

The first cow was easy. After roping her, he checked his horse and the taut rope threw the animal to her knees. Jim was out of the saddle in a flash. Knife in hand, he pounced on his victim, slashing its throat. Here was fresh beef.

He picked a bull next. Once more the rope settled neatly over the wide horns, and the surprised animal fell heavily when the rope tightened. Jim drew his knife and ran forward, but just as he struck, the beast made a lunge at him. He dodged the horns and struck again—true, this time, severing the veins in the massive neck.

"I thought he had you," said Rezin as he rode up.

"He almost did." Jim held up a mangled hand. "I struck so hard the knife slipped through my fingers. I cut myself."

"What you need is a guard between the handle and the blade to prevent such accidents."

Jim looked down at his knife. "That's an idea. Sort of like the hilt on a sword. It'd make a mighty useful tool."

Jim forgot the incident promptly but Rezin took the problem to Jesse Cliffe. Together, they designed a knife with a guard below the grip, for use in such dangerous sport. They were at their task when Jim came to the forge, his hand still bandaged.

"We're fixing you a knife so you'll have no more such accidents," Rezin explained.

Jim looked at the design they had drawn. Jesse already had a piece of steel on the anvil. "Not thát. Haven't you got an old file? Jess Leeman and I made some throwing knives and we found the best steel in old files. It gave us the weight we wanted and it had better temper."

Jesse found an old file and they began again, using Rezin's design. When finished, it had a straight blade about nine inches long. It differed from the ordinary knife in two ways. There was a short guard protecting the handle, and where other weapons were sharpened only on one side, this was sharp on both for a distance of two inches from the point. It made it a plunging as well as a cutting weapon. This also gave the point a more curved appearance than was usual. They finished it with a horn handle.

"A handy weapon." Jim balanced it in his hand. "In some ways I like it better than a throwing knife. A man could do a lot of damage with it."

"What'll we call it?" Jesse Cliffe asked. "Jim Bowie's sword?"

"Too fancy. Besides, you'll have to make one just like it for Rez."

"All right," said Rezin. "We'll call it the Bowie knife."

# 5

# *A Challenge*

EVERYTHING seemed all right until Sybil got up. It had been three days since her last attack of queasiness and she had dismissed it as ended. As soon as she was on her feet, however, she felt it returning and staggered blindly toward the wash basin across the room. Jacques was sympathetic at first. He held her forehead when the dreadful retching shook her. Alarm made him tender.

"You'll be all right in a minute, *chérie,*" he assured her. In his solicitude he blamed himself for her illness.

But as the nausea continued he fell silent. Presently he left her to sit on the edge of the rumpled bed. His lips were compressed into a hard line; he watched as she clung to the washstand.

This was worse than before. She felt weak and her body was wet with sweat. Presently she crawled back into bed.

"Could it have been the wine?" she asked with bloodless lips.

The smile twisted only one corner of his mouth. "And I thought I'd found a little innocent from the country." Even then she didn't understand. "*Mon Dieu!* That I should be tricked this way! Taken in by a wild backwoods filly hunting a father for her brat."

Her eyes darkened. Curiously, she was not frightened, only absorbed by his accusation. Was she pregnant? She recalled hearing that this was a symptom, and now it surprised her that she hadn't guessed it before. She lay there, puzzling over it long after he stormed from the room.

Sybil soon learned to expect anything of Jacques. That day he moved her to the back bedroom, spoke dourly of throwing her into the streets. She was scornful of his bluster, yet knowledge of the baby made her cautious. Where could she go? She dismissed the thought of trudging back to

Bayou Boeuf. She had closed that door. By turns, her husband was fervent and aloof. For two days she didn't see him. Then, as if all his harshness were forgotten, he visited her one night and resumed his place beside her. She thought it was a reconciliation and welcomed him. In the morning he was gone. These vagaries were repeated. Sometimes his mood was tender, on other occasions he ignored her presence in the house.

He did not permit her on the ground floor during the day. "That's a place of business. A woman has no place in a fencing academy." Occasionally, however, Henri Bertin called in one of his genial moods. She enjoyed his rare visits. Her initial liking for him grew.

"You are a fencing master too, Henri. Is your life so lonely?" she asked once when Jacques left them alone in the patio.

"Sometimes. But then I'm not married."

"And the other fencing masters—are they all bachelors too?"

"Hardly," he grunted. "Gay young dogs, most of 'em. Some are married, some aren't. But mostly they're troubled by too many women, not too few."

She pondered this. "Maybe I could make some friends there."

"I think not." He leaned over and patted her hand clumsily. "There's none of 'em good enough for you, Sybil. Are you so lonely then?"

She nodded.

He seemed about to say something and then thought better of it. He rose abruptly. "Tell Jacques I couldn't wait any longer," he explained. "Take good care of yourself, Sybil."

She was sorry to see him go. She wondered at his haste.

Frankie told her so many terrifying tales about childbirth that the reality was a relief. A midwife was summoned at the last and there was Frankie, of course, and Midge hovering constantly in the background with endless steaming kettles. She had memories of pain but later they were mercifully vague. It was a girl and she called her Jacqueline. Her

husband didn't protest. He found a dark satisfaction in feeling the child was named for him. It wasn't. Sybil had asked Henri about that name. It was French feminine for James as well.

Little Jacqueline's hair was almost red. "Who does she take that after?" Henri asked.

"God knows," growled Jacques.

Looking at him Henri had the sense never to repeat the question.

But Sybil knew. She couldn't watch the child without thinking of Jim Bowie.

She recognized the signs of the second baby's coming long before she told Jacques. They were so much apart it was easy to keep the secret and there seemed no appropriate time to tell him. Finally it could be deferred no longer. He was in one of his lighter moods. Henri had been there to dinner, and Jacques wanted a second bottle of wine. Dace didn't answer the bell and he had to go for it himself.

"I think you're much happier these days, Sybil," Henri said abruptly when they were alone.

She was uncomfortable under his gaze. "Things seem to be going much better now."

"Good. Good." He patted her shoulder affectionately.

Returning, Jacques watched the scene. He made no comment. "We'll have a stirrup cup," he said, opening the wine.

"You aren't leaving already?" Sybil turned to Henri in surprise.

He peered at his watch. "I guess it's high time."

They drank standing, the three of them touching their glasses across the table. In parting, Henri kissed her hand. It was his friendly custom.

Sybil was still at the table when Jacques returned. "I have something to tell you," she began. "It's—it's about us. I'm going to have another baby."

"Well," he asked, "who's the father this time?" She stared at him in astonishment. "No, don't tell me. I have eyes in my head. I've been watching Henri."

The wrath of a long year leaped to her lips. "I hate you, Jacques. Henri is your friend."

"And you're my wife."

"I hate you," she whispered again. "You and your filthy mind."

That was when he struck her in the face, his knuckles bruising her mouth. She staggered under the impact, clutched the table for support.

In fury she reached for an empty glass but he anticipated her and sent the tableware crashing with a sweep of his arm.

"I hate you," she kept repeating. It was a whisper no longer.

"That makes us even then," he retorted harshly, and strode up the stairs.

She remained bedridden six weeks after the birth of the second child. Her strength was slow to mend. It was a girl again. The child was three weeks old when Henri came. He'd been slow in hearing of the new arrival.

"I've fetched you a visitor," Jacques announced when he brought him up.

Henri stood in the door, twisting his hatbrim, peering at her anxiously. She stretched out both arms in greeting.

"It's good to see you, Henri."

"And you, Sybil. By Jorry, I think you're playing tricks on us, staying in bed all this time." He kissed her hand. "Where's the new chit? What have you named her?"

Frankie fetched the baby for his inspection.

"Who does she look like?" he demanded.

"We haven't decided." Jacques slouched negligently against the bureau. "Her face was as red as yours the first week, my friend."

Henri grinned. "But she's faded, eh? I never have any luck."

Sybil stared hard at her husband, reading the thought behind his words. Hastily she tried to switch the subject. "What would you suggest for a name, Henri?"

"Oh, I've thought of that." Jacques wasn't to be checked. "I think we should honor Henri this time. How about Henriette?"

"No," cried Sybil. "I won't have it."

"But I insist. He's our oldest friend—and our best one."

"You shan't do this to me." The name would be a constant mockery, reminding her of his ugly accusation. "I won't have it," she stormed. "It's a man's name with a pigtail on it."

"What about Jacqueline?"

"That was different. She was the first child. It was proper she should be named for her father." The words were out before she realized how she'd stepped into his trap. Behind Henri's back Jacques shrugged and grinned derisively.

The younger child was finally named Camille. She gave promise of being a beauty. A *chatin,* the Creoles called her type of brown-eyed blonde. "There's no yellow hair in my family," Jacques commented once. He said little but he never let her forget his thought.

Henri renewed his visits but not so regularly as before. Sybil was careful to see him only if her husband was home. But if Henri noticed this he ignored it. "Tell the children their one-eyed uncle is here" came to be his usual greeting. He dandled the baby awkwardly; with Jacqueline he romped. One such evening was particularly merry. Jacqueline was nearing two now and prattled constantly, acquiring new words each day. Camille was delighting them with her first uncertain steps.

"Never mind coming to the gate, Jacques." Henri's eyes followed Frankie as she took the children off to bed. "I'll let myself out."

"Queer about Henri," Jacques commented when they were alone. "Jacqueline seems to be his favorite. You'd think a man would recognize his own child. Or is he just trying to deceive me?"

She was steeled to his insults, yet they never failed to hurt her. "Can't you ever have a decent thought?" she demanded bitterly. "Sometimes I think——"

She stopped, her eyes wide with consternation. Henri was striding back toward them. His brows were a furious knot, his bluff face red with anger.

"Jacques, you're both a liar and a coward." His voice was cold, flat.

Sybil watched the surprise on her husband's face turn to fury.

Yet he remained more master of himself than Henri.

"You'll answer for that."

"I'm prepared to."

Jacques nodded his head slowly, his smile very wise. "I expected this sooner or later. You two need me out of the way."

"Why, damn your eyes!" Henri took a step forward, his arm reaching out as if he would throttle his antagonist.

Jacques stepped back. "In the morning, Henri." He smiled, finding satisfaction in the other's temper. "Shall we each bring our own seconds or will the usual formalities be necessary?"

"The fewer the better," Henri agreed.

"Shall we say the Oaks at sunrise? The colichemarde." Jacques named his weapon. "Jean Sainet will accompany me."

"I will bring François Molon." Henri bowed to Sybil and stalked away.

It was hard for her to realize the deadliness of the arrangements to which she listened. She'd heard much talk of dueling here. It was a staple of conversation. Always before it had concerned men she did not know. This was different.

She was frightened.

# 6

## *Yellow Fever*

SYBIL heard Jacques drive away in the dawn. He didn't come to her room. There were no good-bys. Then she settled to waiting, tried to picture events as they happened at the distant Oaks. She failed. The sun climbed high, scattering early patio shadows.

At last she knew the outcome. She knew by the pounding on the gate. Jacques would have let himself in. She stood, clutching the rail of the upper gallery, watching, while Frankie brought the stranger to her. He handed her the note.

*Jacques is dead. The bearer, François Molon, is my trusted friend. If you have any immediate needs, tell him. Tonight I will come. Until then, leave everything to your devoted friend— Henri.*

"What—arrangements have been made?" she asked finally.

"I galloped ahead. They're bringing your husband in a carriage."

It was night when Henri came. Dace brought him straight upstairs. This wasn't the old Henri. He was formal and awkward. "I wanted to come straight to you but—" he jerked his head to indicate the world outside— "it would have given life to Jacques's insinuations if I had."

She nodded, groped for words to set him at his ease, and found none. After he clumped away Sybil sat a long time alone on the gallery. She was thinking of the future and was afraid.

"You own this house, the furnishings, three servants—and there's a little cash." It was after the funeral, and Henri had come to help straighten out her affairs. His visits were

still nocturnal, to shield her from any rumor concerning cause of the duel.

"How much money?"

"Don't worry. There's enough to take care of things for a while."

She was suspicious. "You're holding something back."

"There were a lot of bills," he acknowledged, swiftly calculating the amount of his own savings. "After those are paid you'll have twelve hundred and sixty-one dollars."

She was relieved. That seemed a great deal of money. The children were a constant reminder of the need to look ahead, however. She worried the question constantly, looked about her on her daily trips to market.

Final solution of the problem of her future was suggested on one of her afternoon drives. Dace had taken her through the spreading American Colony.

"Where do the people all come from?" she asked Henri that night. "Soon the new town will be bigger than the old."

"I guess it'll always be this way," he replied. "By Jorry, they have to build fast to have a roof over their heads. Even at that the inns are always crowded. There's not a night they don't turn men away."

"Why didn't I think of that before?" Her eyes were wide with excitement. "If they need another inn here, that's what I'll do."

He tried to dissuade her. "No business for a lady," he grumbled. "Besides, there's no need for you to earn money."

She stared at him.

"I hadn't intended to speak so soon," he went on. "I wanted to wait until you had time to forget what happened. But you won't wait and, well—by Jorry, I reckon you must have guessed how I've always thought about you."

Suddenly her throat was so tight she couldn't answer. "I never thought of you like that," she managed to confess at last.

"You're thinking of the duel," he said bluntly. "I'm the one who made you a widow. That's standing between us, isn't it?"

"I've already forgotten the duel, my dear." She yearned

to ease the misery in his face. "You heard enough that night to know how things stood between Jacques and me. Whatever feeling there was between us ended long before that."

"But you still haven't answered me."

She shook her head. "It's because I can't."

"There's no hurry, Sybil. Take time to think about your answer."

"I already know it. I'm sorry. I want to keep you for my friend but anything else is impossible."

With quick tenderness she kissed him on the cheek before she fled upstairs. Sybil thought long of Henri before she went to sleep, but when she closed her eyes she was thinking of Jim Bowie.

When Aaron Hodges reached New Orleans, Madame La Tour's boardinghouse on Julia Street had a reputation eight years long. It was the sort of place he was hunting. He was a widower with a son of four, and he wanted to leave the lad in a woman's care while he was away. He had servants, a man for himself and the child's nurse, Bedelia, a good-humored lump of rippling black jelly.

"I'm going to Texas," he explained. "My first trip will be sort of an exploration to see if it's what I want. I can't take the boy and I won't leave him with just a servant. I've made inquiries. You have children of your own. I'd breathe easy if he was in your care. There's no price you can set on a service like that, but I'm willing to pay well."

Sybil hesitated over the responsibility, but it was two weeks before Hodges was ready to depart and by that time little Joseph had wriggled his way into her affection. The girls liked him. Camille called him Jody and the nickname stuck. Hodges left Bedelia behind to help with his care. He expected to be gone three months.

It was a wet summer. Even when it wasn't raining the air was a moist blanket. "Fever weather," Henri called it. There was a strange pattern to the yellow-fever epidemics which scourged the city periodically. It was present every summer.

This was a bad season. The fever struck the old town first,

clinging to the river as it edged its way into the American Colony. Deaths marked its violence. "It won't end soon," said Sybil. "When it hits this hard we're in for a bad time."

Those who could, and had a place to go, deserted the city. They were few. The rest struggled fearfully through the hot days. School was closed and Sybil kept the girls in. Camille grew petulant at the confinement. One day Sybil returned from market to find both children missing.

"Miz Camille runned off," Frankie explained. "She say she won't stay penned up hyar no longer."

"But where's Miss Jacqueline?"

"She gone off to fin' her sistuh."

She found her, too, and brought her back but not without rebellion. There was a red scratch on Jacqueline's face and Camille's yellow curls were tousled. They were ten and nine, nearly of a size. Apparently the struggle had been on fairly even terms. Camille marched in sullenly with her sister following, eyes agleam with angry purpose. For several days Sybil watched them closely, alert for some sign of fever. Nothing happened.

Jody was never out of the house. Looking back later, Sybil wondered what connection there might be between Camille's truancy and the boy's illness. It began four days later. Her first suspicion was aroused by his lethargy. He usually romped boisterously with the girls. This day he tired quickly, and the next morning he was chilly and complained of a headache. Immediately Sybil sent Dace in search of a doctor, preferably old Dr. Broussard. "Don't come back without one," she warned. "If you can't find him, fetch someone else."

It was long past sunset when Dace returned. Sybil was kneeling by the bed, sleeves rolled up, bathing Jody when he came in.

She looked up and saw he was alone. "I told you not to come back here without a doctor."

"I cotched up with one, ma'am, but he say we have to wait our turn. He say, 'Hang a sheet out'n de window if'n we wants a doctuh an' de fust one passes will stop.' He say dey can't do no mo'."

"Go find Mr. Henri," she ordered fiercely. "He'll get a doctor."

She sent Midge to hang a sheet from a window and Bedelia for fresh water. She knew nothing else to do. Sometimes the cool baths stopped Jody's wild chattering for a time.

Henri came and went, swearing softly. "By Jorry, I'll fetch a doctor if I have to drag him by the scruff of his neck," he promised.

His return was slower than Dace's had been. There weren't enough doctors to go around. The second day he picked up the trail of one, following him from house to house, where the odor of the pestilence hung heavy. It was nightfall before he caught up with the haggard man. He hardly recognized Dr. Broussard.

The doctor stared down at the sleeping boy, his eyes heavy with fatigue. He looked as ill as the patient.

"How often has he wet the bed?" he demanded abruptly.

She told him.

"Good," he grunted. "I've noticed that's a good sign. If they don't I never save 'em."

He described the course of the disease. This was the lull which followed the first few days of violent fever. In fatal cases it was followed by a reaction. "Now's when nursing counts," he said. "Bring him through this and you've got it whipped."

That was the doctor's only call. He was stricken the next morning, and died five days later. But Jody recovered.

# 7

# *Texas Journey*

ACADIA developed rapidly and the Bowie brothers were there often, though they had many ties in the old neighborhood and maintained their home there for the present. The country was filling up; a prosperous town had grown around the old Rapides courthouse at Alexandria, and the back country was a land of great plantations. The Wells family, the Cunys, the Blanchards and the Cranes formed a landed aristocracy that promised to repeat the easy, gracious pattern of Natchez.

There were four of the Wells brothers, their names as imposing as the great plantation houses in which they lived. They were James Montfort, known better simply as "the General," Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and Samuel Levi. All were close friends of the Bowies but Sam Wells, the only brother unmarried, was Jim's particular crony. When not with Rezin he was apt to be with Sam. There were occasions when he spent a week at a time in his friend's home.

Jim spoke of Texas often. Its treeless prairies stuck in his memory, and it was a story Sam liked to hear.

"I'd like to see that country."

"Why don't we go? There's nothing to stop us. Everything's going smoothly here." Jim needed only such a suggestion. "Your brothers can look after your plantation. Rezin will keep an eye on mine."

They agreed upon the journey and perfected their plans before confiding in anyone.

Rezin guessed his intention when he found the Spanish grammar on Jim's desk. "But why? Haven't you everything you want here?"

"I've been hearing tales about the new colonies in Texas. Mexico's a republic now. They've driven the Spaniards out

and they're welcoming settlers. It's a rich country, Rezin, and there's money to be made over there."

"We have enough. What would you do with more?"

But the old restlessness had seized Jim. He was determined to go. "I'll just look around," he said. "It's sort of a prospecting trip. If things are as good as they sound——" He never finished the sentence.

There were three routes open to them, the old Camino Real through Nacogdoches, by water from New Orleans, or the southern trail, which they took. It was the most difficult of the three but the most direct. Jim favored it because he knew it best. It approximated the path he had taken so often in the days he smuggled slaves. They traveled light but in comfort matching their means. They were well mounted and each had a body servant to make the trail camps comfortable. There was one pack horse for their baggage.

Before they reached Anahuac they fell in with a planter named Aaron Hodges, whose means seemed to equal their own. They liked this stranger, struck up a ready friendship and traveled together.

Their first destination was San Felipe, capital of the Austin colony. They found it prospering. Hodges was tempted to stay there. "Not me," said Bowie. "I'm pushing on to San Antonio. I've not seen that country yet."

"They're all Spanish there. I think I'd rather stay where people speak my own tongue."

"There are two ways of settling here," Jim explained. "Austin's an impresario. The colony is his. He arranges the grants, gets the settlers, finances and establishes them. He handles every detail and makes his profit as a result. Mind you, there's nothing wrong with that. He helps them and they help him. But that's for the little people. The other way is to buy your own land, handle the affairs yourself. I'm pushing on."

Jim's explanation convinced Sam and Aaron Hodges both. His way was theirs. San Antonio de Bexar lay more than two hundred miles west from San Felipe, and was the ancient capital of the province. "Bexar" the Mexicans called it and they quickly discovered why. The term was used to

describe a collection of settlements. Actually, there were eight of them: four loosely grown together into a town, as many more missions at short intervals along the river below. Secularized now, these missions still housed villages for those who worked the irrigated farms around them. The canals built by the Spanish fathers still watered fertile fields. The four settlements of the town proper revealed in their character their various origins. A stout wall surrounded San Antonio de Bexar. It had been established as a presidio and was more fort than town. San Fernando de Bexar was founded after later settlement, and showed it. It stretched its fingers in each direction, uniting the other villages. San Antonio de Valero, across the river, had started as a mission. South of it La Villita, newest of them all, and smallest, hugged its high bank and looked enviously across the stream at its neighbors.

There was more to their liking for this place than just its geography. They found its people hospitable. They spent weeks here and made many friends. Hodges decided to settle on the Guadalupe River not far away, where he found land to his liking. Bowie's curiosity was insatiable. Soon the surrounding country was a map in his mind.

"I may come back and join you here," he told Hodges. "I like the place." Only Sam Wells remained unaffected by the land's promise.

Aaron Hodges returned to Louisiana with them. His son was waiting there, and there was much to do before he could move to his new plantation site. They parted in New Orleans; Bowie and Wells were in a hurry to be home. Hodges thought his preparations would take him about a month. "I'll see you before you leave," Jim promised.

Jody's illness took his father by surprise. The danger was past. He was up and walking, still a little shaky, the only mark of the disease his lemon skin, when his father returned. Aaron caught the boy up and held him in his arms as he listened to the story.

For some time Aaron was reluctant to leave the boy's side. When he looked at his thin figure it was hard for him to believe the lad was mending, despite Sybil's assurances.

When he did go out he liked to take his son with him in the carriage. Once he plunged into his preparations, his energy was tremendous. He bought wagons, oxen, horses and farm equipment of all sorts. Later he remembered house furnishings and for that he enlisted Sybil's aid.

"It must be mahogany," he said. "Nothing but the best."

She accompanied him on several of these buying excursions. Finally his purchases were complete, down to the last candle mold. Still he waited. "I want Jody strong again before I start," he explained.

There was a week of this waiting. He seldom left the house now, and his manner subtly changed. When busy with his buying he had been talkative, full of his plans. Now he grew taciturn. Sybil found his silences puzzling, wondered at them. One night after the children were abed he explained.

"I'm naturally a straightforward man," he began. "There's probably a better way to lead up to this but I don't know it and that isn't my nature. I admire you very much, Mrs. LaTour, and I want you to marry me."

"Why, I had no idea—I mean this is all new to me, Mr. Hodges."

"I knew there must be a better way of saying it," he admitted ruefully. "I guess when I want something I just take the bull by the horns. The fact is I'm going to a new country. My boy needs a mother and—well—I'll do my best for your girls, too. I'm afraid I'm making a mess of this," he stumbled on, "but—well, I've never met anyone I'd rather have raise my son."

"That's a very real compliment," Sybil replied soberly. She found his rugged honesty appealing, and hunted words to soften her answer.

"You love Jody," he said with sudden desperation as if realizing what her reply would be. "Don't answer me now," he urged. "Wait a few days. Take time to think it over."

He rushed from the room as if afraid to wait longer.

Sybil thought of it, of course. Not with doubt. She knew her answer, wished it might be avoided. One evening at bedtime when Jody came to kiss her good night as usual, she

looked up and saw Aaron watching her. She flushed, conscious of his thought.

In spite of her liking for him she began finding subterfuges to avoid being alone with him.

A few days later she was coming home from market. Since the fever had ended in the town she had resumed her daily trips.

"Dace, stop!"

The Negro halted the carriage and turned to look at her white face in wonder. "Wot's a-matter, Missy? Yo' ain't sick?"

Sybil didn't even hear his question. Her eyes were on Jim Bowie striding through the crowded street. She started to call his name, then changed her mind. That wasn't the way. She watched his long steps carrying him farther and farther away. Soon he'd be gone.

She couldn't let that happen.

"Turn around," she urged feverishly. "Quick, Dace, turn around."

They were hemmed in by a passing dray. The maneuver took time.

Bowie had disappeared when they turned back.

# 8

## *The Past Won't End*

SYBIL watched from the musty phaeton as black Dace approached the doorway of Faisendieu's Posade. This was the fourth place she had tried, beginning with the Hotel de la Marine on the water front. There she had hired a public carriage. It attracted less attention than her own barouche. That wasn't the only reason. She needed Dace to enter the inns and make her inquiries.

Bowie was at Faisendieu's. When he heard there was a woman in a carriage below to see him he sent the slave away angrily. He knew their guileful ways, he reminded himself, and besides the slave wouldn't even reveal his mistress' name.

"Probably some trollop," he growled. "If a man has means they think he's easy." He refused to see her.

The black returned, his reluctance expressed in his slow shuffle. "She got to see you, Mist' Bowie. She say it mos' impo'tant."

"Tell her I'm not here."

"She knows I done talked to you, suh."

The carriage had drawn into the courtyard below. By scowling down from the gallery Jim could see it. His inspection revealed nothing; it was a battered public rig. There were usually several of them waiting outside Le Veau-qui-Tête on the Rue de la Levée. The Negro could tell her what he pleased. He wouldn't ask her up. He stalked back to his room, expecting to find the slave still waiting. He was gone. In his place stood a woman leaning against the door. He brushed past her. "I sent word I wouldn't see you." His voice was gruff.

When she didn't reply he turned his head. His face went bleak, a taut mask to hide behind. It was Sybil! After all these years!

She took in the harsh lines around his mouth, almost cruel now.

"You've changed, Jim."

"Let's see. This is 1827. It's been eleven years."

"But you've remembered."

That seemed very important.

"Some things are best forgotten," he said slowly. "You're one of them, Sybil."

"What if I don't want to be forgotten?"

"That mattered, once. You had other plans."

"Things like that just happen, Jim. They aren't planned."

His deep-set eyes never wavered from her face. "You made your choice." There was a finality about his tone, as if that ended the subject.

It's his eyes that have changed, she thought. They've turned so hard. "Would I have come here if it were as simple as that?" She said after a moment. "My choice! How can a child know her mind? I've had a long time to think things out, Jim."

"Maybe you've heard how things have changed with me," was his blunt retort. "It was money you wanted, beautiful clothes, a fine house, servants. Well, I can buy them now. It's no secret."

"Oh, Jim, Jim——"

He moved a little to keep his eyes in shadow; he didn't want her reading them. Memories were crowding back upon him now, the smooth warmth of her skin, the clean fragrance of her hair when he held her close. She was waiting. He had only to take a few steps. He rebelled against the thought. Was he as easy as that? Had she only to beckon for him to come docilely back to her arms?

His anger was directed as much at himself as at her. It made him ruthless.

"I've one thing to thank you for, Sybil." His voice had grown hoarse. "Ambition. I didn't realize how important money was then, how much it would buy. I had a queer sense of values." He stopped a moment and when he continued his voice was so low she scarcely could hear him.

"After you left I sold the place on Bayou Boeuf. I realized then what I wanted. Money!" He sounded half-contemptuous, half-amused. "You were a good teacher, Sybil. By then I understood that was all that really mattered. Money to buy your way in the world, fine houses, silks. That's what women want and men are fools if they don't realize it."

"I think I'll leave you now." Sybil groped for the doorknob. "I think the things I came to say were for someone else. I couldn't tell them to you. You aren't the Jim Bowie I knew. He was warm and real and human."

"It took a woman to change me." His lips curled mockingly.

She started to turn and then thought better of it. For a moment she stared at him steadily. "I don't believe it," she said finally. "You can't really have changed this much. You're trying to punish me."

He shrugged. "Why did you come here, Sybil? What do you want?"

"I needed most just to see you. I wanted to know if all the things I remembered of you were true. The way you talked. The sound of your laugh. Your gentleness. All the things that made your memory dear."

"And you find me very different?"

She studied the man before her briefly. It was the same tall frame, with shoulders too wide for his lean-flanked body. There was little change in him unless you looked at his face.

"Not too different outside. Your eyes have changed though. Right now they're hard. I'm wondering if that is the real you."

He started to reply, checked himself, shrugged. "Does it matter?" he finally asked.

"I thought so when I came. It mattered so much that I screwed up all my courage for this visit. It wasn't easy. If you had been the Jim Bowie I remembered, it would have meant a great deal to me."

"Don't tell me you can remember the past so well."

"I have a constant reminder of our past, Jim. You see, we had a child."

He had been leaning against the mantel, his restless fingers twisting a candlestick. Now they grew still. "You expect me to believe this?"

"Does it matter whether you do or not?"

He seemed not to have heard her. "I don't believe a word you've said. I should have expected some such trick. The truth isn't in you." When she didn't answer it infuriated him. "You hear? I don't believe a word of it. You tricked me before. This is just some more of your scheming."

Without answering she opened the door. Then she stood staring at him, her face white and still. Whatever the question in her eyes it remained unasked. She merely watched as the blood of his anger slowly reddened his face. Then turning, she closed the door after her.

He listened to her quick footsteps on the stairs. After they were gone his fingers closed about the handle of a knife lying on the mantel. With a deft movement he drew it from its scabbard and hurled it across the room. The blade split the panel of the door where she had stood. He stared at it quivering there.

"It's a lie," he growled.

There was no sleep for her that night. She was taunted by memory. Jim Bowie had grown to be a faith with her, a promise for some distant future. Now that was ended, she had nothing. When she tried to look ahead she saw only emptiness. I wish I'd married Henri, she told herself once, but she knew that wasn't her answer. Her fondness for Henri was too genuine. She couldn't cheat her best friend, pretend a love she didn't feel.

With Aaron Hodges it was different. He wanted a woman he could respect, someone to make him a home, to care for his child. It wasn't love he asked. There was no deception here.

She could go with him to Texas, start a new life, turn her back on all the bruised memories. They were married two days later. It had to be hurried because the ship which was to carry them to Matagorda was already loading.

Sybil knew nothing of Aaron's friendship with Jim Bowie

until she saw them together at the wharf. Aaron was waiting there when she arrived in the carriage with Jody. The others had gone before. Jim watched her arrival. Aaron followed the direction of his eyes. "That's my boy—and my wife." Bowie's eyes chilled. He restrained an impulse to laugh, not with mirth but with the scorn he felt. So Sybil was this man's wife. He was tempted to warn him against her.

A little girl played on the deck. His eyes followed her blond curls.

"You told me you had a boy. I didn't know there were other children."

"That's my stepdaughter. Come here, Camille."

She advanced to the rail and stood peering down at them. Jim scanned each feature carefully. She had her mother's wide brown eyes. He saw little else of Sybil there. All the doubts that had troubled him since his interview with Sybil returned. "How old are you, child?" He spoke with an effort, smoothing the harshness from his voice.

"I'm nine."

He turned away, wanting to be alone. Nine years old, and it was eleven years since he and Sybil had parted at Bayou Boeuf.

She was lying, he told himself bitterly. I should have known.

# 9

## *Feud in Alexandria*

JIM returned to Rapides Parish in a savage mood. Rezin was glad to see him back; so was Sam Wells. There was a feud in Alexandria, three years old. It had its inception in the presidential election of 1824, when the community had split into violent factions. Instead of healing with time, it had only grown worse until, in the past year, the factions had come to be tightly formed. What had started as an election quarrel now threatened to break into civil war. Clay men and Jackson men they had called themselves at first. There had been other candidates, Crawford of Georgia and John Quincy Adams, but the frontier country was almost solidly behind the two leading western candidates, Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson. The Bowies, the Wells brothers and the Cuny family were Clay adherents and leaders of that faction. The Cunys were planters too, even wealthier than the Wells brothers. The Clay party had its roots in these big plantation families.

The town was the stronghold of the Jackson men. Major Norris Wright, the sheriff, was its leader. The Bowies didn't like him because they thought him tricky. That had started with the election, too. Clay had carried Louisiana by popular vote; there remained only the formality of the state convention to name presidential electors, which Norris Wright attended. Jim Bowie, assuming the issue settled at the polls, had not been a candidate for the convention. When he heard its result he flew into a rage.

"Did you hear what happened?" Sam Wells demanded. "The Jackson men got control of the convention, and when they saw they couldn't put their own man over they switched to Adams. Clay is defeated."

"But they can't do that. It's trickery. We voted for Clay."

"They did do it."

Jim made no secret of his contempt for Norris Wright after that. "A damned trickster," he called him on his next visit to the coffeehouse. "A man who'd steal an election would steal money."

A week later Major Wright met Jim Bowie on the street. Wright was wearing a pistol; Bowie was unarmed.

"You're not man enough to say to my face what you've been telling behind my back," Wright blustered. "I'd call you out."

"I said you were a damned trickster." Bowie kept walking toward him.

The Major grabbed his pistol. "Stand where you are. I'll not take that from anyone."

Bowie's stride didn't falter, still he kept coming.

"You hear me? I'll give you what you're asking for."

When Jim saw the pistol raised he ran, not away, but for his antagonist. The Major fired. It didn't stop the rush. Bowie grabbed the smoking weapon, threw it far. One of his slender hands, a hard fist now, crashed into Wright's face.

Then he seized the man by the throat, lifted him clear of the ground, shook him like a rat. Wright beat at him with his fists, kicked at him. He seemed not to notice.

Bowie didn't release his prey; he threw him down, sprawling in the street's red dust, and pounced after him. His friends finally dragged him off. "You'll kill him, Jim," General Cuny protested.

"And good riddance. That's why you shouldn't have stopped me."

They discovered later that Wright had fired too hastily. His bullet had grazed Bowie's ribs. It was a minor wound.

Wright had a reputation as a duelist but he sent no challenge. He knew Bowie's marksmanship.

Before the excitement of this incident had time to die, Sam Wells heard the scurrilous story that was going the rounds concerning his brother, General Montfort Wells, and the wife of one of his friends. It was told with a snicker as he passed the coffeehouse frequented by the Wright faction.

"Hold on, Sam. You were meant to hear that." Bowie grasped his friend's arm.

"I can't let it pass."

"Of course not. But don't let anyone bait a trap for you. If you go rushing in there now, it's just what they want."

Sam called a meeting of the Wells clan. All four brothers were present. An investigation was started; the tale was quickly traced to Dr. Tom Maddox, who was fairly new in Alexandria.

General Wells immediately called on the doctor and demanded to know the source of his story.

"It was told me by a lady patient," retorted Maddox. "I refuse to drag a lady's name into this."

"You damned scoundrel, you've already dragged a lady's name into it. If you were a gentleman, sir, I'd call you out."

"I'm not." Maddox laughed, and slammed the door.

Two days later Maddox, driving down the road in a buggy, met the general armed with a shotgun.

"Are you going to tell me where you heard that damned lie?"

Maddox had a friend named Barnard with him, and also was fortified by the knowledge that the general was the worst shot in Rapides. "Go to hell," he retorted.

The general fired but, true to his reputation, missed the doctor and shot Barnard in the knee. That evening Major Wright and Alfred Blanchard called on General Wells, challenging him to a duel in behalf of Dr. Maddox. The general wanted to accept at once but Sam insisted on calling a meeting to consider what should be done. Present at the conference were the Wells brothers, the Cunys and the Bowie brothers. Sam explained his purpose. He wanted to avert open warfare between the factions.

It was General Cuny who offered a solution. "Maddox is a blackguard," he said. "No gentleman could meet him on the field of honor, Montfort. You can't fight him."

"Damn it, man, can I sit quiet while that jackleg sawbones spreads his lies?" the general retorted. But the others seized quickly on the peaceful solution, however, persuaded him that as a gentleman he couldn't meet such a

fellow in a duel. The challenge must be ignored. He was convinced against his will.

"It's very simple," he finally told Wright. "Maddox is nothing but a scavenger who bandies women's names about. No gentleman would meet him."

This didn't end the matter. Colonel Crane, a Jackson partisan, took it up promptly, sending Wright back with his message. "Colonel Crane is a gentleman of the highest birth. If you won't fight Maddox you can't refuse to meet Crane."

This delighted the doughty general. It gave him a chance to take a slap at a prominent member of the other faction. "To hell with Crane. He's nothing but a cheap swindler. Tell him to pay the Cunys what he owes 'em and then I'll listen to his boasts about being a gentleman."

When Crane heard this he flew into a rage. In reply he sent word that he would make it a street fight the next time the Wellses came to Alexandria. "So it's a brawl they want, eh?" exclaimed General Wells. "By God, I'll give it to 'em."

"That's exactly what we don't want," Sam Wells replied. "A duel would be better than a pitched battle. I'm going to fight Tom Maddox."

"If there's any fightin' done, I'll do it," his brother retorted angrily.

"No, you stay out of this. You've already got everybody seeing red and besides, you're so nearsighted you can't hit the side of a barn. I'm going to fight Maddox if he'll do it my way. What we want is to keep the quarrel out of Alexandria. The terms of my challenge are these: I'll meet him in Natchez, on neutral ground, two weeks from today, each of us to bring four seconds to insure fair play, and to furnish his own surgeon. That delays it long enough to let some of their hotheads cool off and it should keep the trouble from spreading."

Jim Bowie and General Sam Cuny carried the challenge. Dr. Maddox accepted. The stage was set.

# 10

## *The Sand-Bar Duel*

WHEN they reached Natchez, almost the first man Bowie saw was Jess Leeman. "Whar ye headin', Jim? We'll throw in together."

Jim explained his mission. "That's one place I can't take you, Jess," he laughed. "As soon as this business is settled I'm going to Acadia. How about coming along?"

"Dogged if I won't."

Bowie laughed. "We'll ride back together."

Final arrangements for the duel were completed at the Kentucky Tavern that night. It was to be held on the sand bar on the Louisiana side of the river, General Cuny to be Sam Wells's second, Colonel Crane to serve Maddox. Except for the surgeons, the others were to remain at a distance until the affair was ended. Each second was to bring two pistols, the others were to come unarmed.

The Wells party was first on the scene. Sam carried a wicker hamper over his arm. "What have you got in there? An extra brace of pistols?" Bowie laughed. Sam opened the hamper, revealing several bottles of wine. "If I have any luck this feud is going to end right here this morning after I meet Maddox. Once the demands of honor are satisfied, I'll ask them to drink with us. This endless fighting must be stopped."

Maddox and his friends arrived then; final arrangements for the fight were quickly completed. Accompanied only by their seconds and their surgeons, the two principals walked briskly to the far end of the bar. Crane drew a long line in the wet sand with the tip of his boot. Maddox and Wells each stood ten paces beyond the line, facing each other. They were to fire at the word. Their seconds, Crane and General Cuny, also armed, stood at each end of the line. The surgeons waited in the background.

Crane gave the word; both men fired and missed.

"Are you satisfied, gentlemen?" Cuny asked.

Maddox shook his head.

"Then load up the pistols," said Wells. "I'm here to accommodate the doctor."

The formalities were repeated with Cuny giving the word this time. Once more both shots went wide. This time Wells left his position, advanced toward the line, hand outstretched.

"You've proved your courage, Maddox. I'm satisfied if you are. Will you shake hands?"

This was enough for Maddox. He advanced and took Wells's hand.

"Come have a drink with us, gentlemen. I'd like this to be the end of our fighting," Sam invited.

Maddox looked inquiringly at Crane. "What do you think, Colonel?"

Crane shrugged. Wells and Maddox both interpreted it as assent. Together they walked toward the willows where the others waited. The two seconds remained behind to put the pistols away. Each held his own still-loaded weapon and the empty one used by his principal. Crane reloaded his empty gun, but Cuny did not wait for that. He strode off, ahead of Crane.

Back among the willows Jim Bowie was first to realize what Wells had done.

"Sam's ended the feud," he said. "This is a good day's work." He rushed forward to greet them.

Major Wright knew nothing of Sam Wells's plan and was suspicious. He started in pursuit. Colonel Crane had just finished repriming Maddox' weapon. He saw Bowie hurrying toward Maddox, Wright after him. He drew both pistols from the box.

"Stand where you are, Cuny," he called. "No tricks."

Cuny looked back over his shoulder. Crane was advancing, a pistol in each hand. The general grabbed for his own weapons in the box under his arm, but he picked the empty gun.

Both surgeons saw the drawn weapons. They leaped be-

tween the men, hoping to stop the quarrel. This added to the confusion. Crane, robbed of his first target, aimed at the approaching Bowie and fired. The bullet went through Jim's hip. He swayed but didn't fall. Under the agreement to leave firearms behind, Jim had only the hunting knife in his belt, the strange blade Jesse Cliffe had fashioned for him and named the Bowie knife. He drew it as he advanced. Crane threw aside his empty weapon and aimed the other.

Cuny tried to protect Bowie. He aimed at Crane. The unloaded weapon clicked harmlessly. He snatched the other from the box and fired. It was a hasty shot; it drilled Crane through the left arm, spun him around. The two doctors grabbed Cuny, tried to hold him back, but sight of Bowie limping grimly forward, armed only with a knife, alarmed him. Crane still had a loaded weapon.

The general wrenched free and charged forward with nothing but an empty pistol. Crane saw him coming, met his attack with a bullet through the body. Cuny fell.

Bowie, slowed by his wound, still limped forward. Crane struck at him with his empty pistol. The blow staggered him. He sank to his knees, half-blinded by the blood from a long gash in his scalp. Then he was up again, stumbling on, blade in hand.

With one more look at the knife he clutched, Crane turned and ran.

Bowie saw Norris Wright rushing toward him. The Major carried a sword cane. It was unsheathed. The blade went straight through Jim's chest. When the Major tried to wrench it free, it broke off in the wound. Bowie fell.

Wright pounced. "Damn you, Bowie. I've got you where I want you."

They were his last words. With one hand, his intended victim pulled him down; in the other his Bowie knife gleamed. It was hard to tell them apart when their friends ran up; both were covered with blood. Wright was still on top but when they pulled him off there were six great gashes in his body. He was dead.

The truce arranged by Wells and Maddox was re-established now. They buried Cuny and Wright on the sand

bar. Crane's wound was slight, but neither surgeon held much hope for Bowie.

"He won't last the day out," Dr. Denny said.

"You don't know me. I'm tough," Bowie said faintly, after they had pulled the broken blade from his chest.

They took him back to the tavern in Natchez. His friends stayed with him for three days, doing what they could, but it was Jess Leeman who never left his side. He wanted to move Bowie to the plantation of some friends. "He needs nursin' an' that takes a woman."

Sam Wells agreed to the plan when the doctor lent it his support.

"I believe Jess is right. Nursing is the only thing that can pull him through, but I hate to think of leaving him with strangers."

"These ain't strangers. Th'ar friends o' mine. Leave it to me. Jim's goin' to pull through."

When Jess Leeman spoke of friends here, Wells investigated. He expected to find a humble cabin and was surprised by the great brick manor of the Kirks of Marsten's Hill. The Kirks were kindly, gracious.

"You know a man named Jess Leeman?" he began hesitantly.

"He's an old friend," Kirk responded heartily.

"And a dear one," his wife added. "You've come to make arrangements for his wounded friend, I suppose. Jess has told us all about it. We'll see he has the best of care."

That dispelled Wells's last doubt. "He'll get better care there than we can give him," he told his companions. He looked at Leeman curiously. "You've got some mighty high friends."

"None better." Jess didn't explain.

In the critical days which followed Jess and Mrs. Kirk were Jim's principal nurses. This woman puzzled Jim. He resented his helplessness, hated being so dependent upon her. His mother, his younger sister Martha and, to a certain extent, Maggie, were the only women excepted from his hostility. There had been times, of course, when a pretty face intrigued him, but always he remembered Sybil. He

had much time to think of her, lying helpless here. It didn't soothe his bitterness.

"And I almost believed her!" he muttered. "I told her she was lying but I wanted to think it was the truth. If it had been our child——"

"Did you want something?" Mrs. Kirk was bending over him.

He shook his head and she went away. "Cissy" Jess called Mrs. Kirk. That puzzled him.

"You seem to know these folks mighty well," he said to Jess.

"I've knowed her since she war a sprig. I fit alongside her brother an' her pa in Kirk's Scouts back in Texas."

"Kirk's Scouts? That has a familiar sound."

"Yo're in Kirk's house, Jim. We're all that's left of the old comp'ny after Magee's expedition failed. We come out together, the three of us—Cissy, Jonty Kirk an' me. Why, this house is named after our old settlement in Texas, Marsten's Hill. Close? Man, we fit together, watched our friends die, an' buried 'em when we had the chanct. Thar never war a better comp'ny than Kirk's Scouts, and we're the last of 'em."

If Cissy Kirk realized her patient's hostility, she ignored it. Gradually it died. "She's like Ma," Jim told himself. "I reckon there are good women."

There was a houseful of children. He never guessed it until he was able to sit up, they'd been kept so quiet. The oldest was his favorite, a boy of thirteen named Marsten. "Mars" they called him.

"I want to see your Bowie knife," was his first demand when they met.

"You mean my hunting knife?"

"Your *Bowie* knife," the boy insisted. "The one everybody's talking about. Why, Uncle Zeke says it's two feet long, with a blade like a razor. He says there's no use trying to run away either, no matter how hard you try. He says you can throw it straight through a running man."

"Now, son," Mrs. Kirk began sharply.

"Don't scold him, Cissy. Shucks, that's mild to some of

the tales th'ar tellin'." Jess came to the lad's defense. "I never hyard sech yarns, Jim. Ever'body's talkin' 'bout that knife o' yores. Why, jest yestiddy in town a feller offered me twenty dollars if'n I let him see it. He wants to make a copy of it."

A few days later Captain Reese Fitzpatrick of Natchez journeyed out to see Bowie.

"I'm a gunsmith," he introduced himself. "Good weapons are my specialty. Will you let me copy your Bowie knife?"

"It wasn't intended as a weapon, Captain. There seem to be a lot of queer stories going around. I used it at the sand bar because I was unarmed."

"You mind if I see it?"

Jim sent Mars for the knife. The captain examined it closely. "And you say you were unarmed?" was his final comment. "Mr. Bowie, I'll give you fifty dollars if you'll let me copy this."

Jim let him copy the knife.

Mars was a hero-worshiper. As Jim mended so that he could walk about the plantation, the boy followed everywhere at his heels. Jim taught him woodcraft, and had a throwing knife made for him at the plantation forge.

"See how different it is from any other kind of knife, Mars? No guard, almost no handle. Weight there would destroy your balance and shiver your blade when it hit the target." He taught him to throw at a mark.

Mars was fascinated, too, when he learned that Bowie was familiar with Texas. "I've always wanted to go there," he confessed. "Someday I will."

"I'm thinking the same thing, son. Don't forget. If you ever do go, be sure and look me up."

Bowie was thinking of Sybil. She was in Texas. But that isn't why I'm going, he told himself savagely. I never want to see her again.

# 11

## *A Meeting in Texas*

REZIN found a buyer for the plantation near Alexandria.

"I'm going to Texas, Rez." Jim made the announcement the first evening after his return to Acadia.

"But you just got home."

"You don't need me here. Things are in fine shape. If we're going to make any m ıey, now's the time to move into Texas while the country's still new and settlers are pouring in. There'll be a great demand for land. The time to buy is when it's cheap. We can make another fortune there, Rez."

For some time his brother didn't answer.

"I reckon the Bowie brothers are still climbing," he said finally.

Jim looked at him sharply. "You like it here, don't you?"

"I do. I'd be content never to set foot off Acadia the rest of my days. But we're partners, Jim, and I don't mean just in our business ventures. If you leave I leave."

Jim understood what this plantation meant to his brother. "We'll just go over and look around this time. We don't need ɔ decide yet." But in his heart he knew there was no doubt.

Bowie was surprised by the changes that had occurred in Texas during his absence. In addition to many independent settlers, numerous men had copied Austin's colonization plan. Austin himself had acquired new grants. They met a number of these men, Dewitt who had his capital at Gonzales and was bringing in many families, Ben Milam whose grant lay northwest of San Antonio, David Burnett and others. "Maybe this is what we should have done, Rez," Jim said. "Take up a big grant, introduce settlers, establish a colony." The eastern settlements were wholly Anglo-Ameri-

can. San Antonio remained Spanish, both in population and custom.

Jim enjoyed the warm hospitality of these kindly people. He, Rezin and Jess Leeman were welcomed in one home frequently. Juan Martin Veramendi lived in almost regal style; he had vast estates, both in Coahuila and Texas but his principal seat was—the Veramendi Palace, in San Antonio. Here the Bowies met the colonial aristocracy; the Seguins, the Flores, the Navarros and the de la Garzas. This was a proud circle; on their haciendas they lived in feudal splendor; their town houses were apt to be on the same scale.

The Comanche raid on the Flores hacienda helped their introduction here. A war party had swooped down on an outlying camp, killed two herdsmen and driven off thirty horses.

"What are we going to do?" Jim demanded.

Don Juan Veramendi shrugged. "There's a garrison here but they'll do nothing. An able officer would put an end to these raids with half the force. I write protests and that's the end of it."

"Give me ten men and I'll get those horses back," Jim said quietly.

He had no trouble getting volunteers. Juan Seguin was the first; then Ramón Navarro. Others were quick to follow. Colonel Gonzales at the presidio was derisive. "The young bloods of the town," he scoffed. "They'll come back soon enough with their tails between their legs."

They rode at once, not for the Flores plantation but in a more westerly direction. Bowie knew his ground. If these were Comanches they were heading for the hills and he intended to intercept their flight. Jim and Jess rode ahead, seaching for the path the Indians had taken. They picked up the trail miles from its starting place. When they reached the hills Jess rode far ahead, scouting each crest carefully. Once he beckoned Jim to join him, and they scanned a distant cloud of dust.

"How big a party is it, Jess? Can you tell?"

"Can't say. Th'ar drivin' too many stolen hosses. Maybe thar's twenty of 'em—maybe more."

At sunset Jess figured the Indians were two hours ahead. They found a copse in which to hide their horses. "Prime your rifles here," Jim ordered. "No telling what we'll run into." He checked each man personally, all but Rezin and Jess. He knew them.

The Indians were encamped beside a creek in a cup-shaped valley. Three mounted warriors herded the grazing animals. Jim counted eighteen others around the blaze. He made his dispositions swiftly.

"We must make sure of the mounted men if we want to get the horses. Otherwise they'll stampede 'em."

He assigned Rezin two men for this task. They were to circle up the valley beyond the herd and await the signal. "Try to get 'em on the first volley," Jim urged. "Even if you don't you'll turn 'em back this way." He pointed to a hill on the east. "Watch that crest. We'll be set by the time the moon rises behind it. Then you fire first, Rez. That'll be our signal."

His other men he grouped in a semicircle, with Jess on the opposite flank. "Why don't we surround them, Señor Bowie?" Juan Seguin suggested. "Then none will escape."

Jim grinned. "If we're in a circle we'll be shooting across into ourselves. No, we'll advance in an arc but we'll have 'em pinned against the creek. Not many will get away."

Rezin's little volley sounded first. Before the Indians around the fire could reach their feet, flames spurted at them from three sides. Eight of their number were down; the others fled toward the creek. Jim Bowie had much experience with Indians but these were the first Comanches he had fought. He was not prepared for their furious onslaught after the second volley. The Indians had waited for it, hugging the shadows until the rifles hemming them in should be empty. They charged with wild yells. Bowie brought one down with his pistol, a second leaped on him with poised knife. Juan Seguin hurried to help him, swinging his clubbed rifle, but before the blow could land the Comanche was dead. Bowie's knife had been quicker. Seguin received a lance thrust in the shoulder while trying to save his leader.

The horses were recovered and they counted fourteen dead raiders. Except for Seguin's wound, Bowie's men suffered no casualties.

"You shouldn't have tried to help me. Next time look out for yourself," Jim cautioned.

"But, señor, your pistol was empty and his knife was raised. I thought sure you were dead unless I stopped him."

"Here's something to remember." Bowie drew his knife and held it, point up, to illustrate. "A white man's always better than an Indian with a knife if he uses his wits. The savage holds his knife blade down and chops with it like a tomahawk. That's bad fighting. He has to raise his arm before he lowers it. The way to use a knife is to slash up."

San Antonio welcomed them as heroes. It was the worst drubbing given the Comanches in years, and the volunteers were proud of their achievement. Soon they were calling themselves Bowie's men.

"Why didn't you tell me you were *the* Jim Bowie?" Juan Veramendi demanded one day.

"What do you mean?" Jim asked in surprise.

For answer, Veramendi showed him one of the knives made by Fitzpatrick in Natchez. On the blade, above the maker's name, was stamped "Genuine Bowie Knife."

The Bowies had been away two months. Rezin was growing impatient. "It's time we turned back. We're needed at Acadia, Jim. Mag can't run it alone no matter how much help she has."

"You're not fooling me, Rez. 'Tisn't Acadia you're worrying about, it's Maggie. You go on home and tell her I sent you. I'm not ready to leave yet. I like this place."

Jess left with him. After they were gone Juan Veramendi insisted that Jim stay with him. Life was very pleasant in the Veramendi Palace where Doña Josepha Veramendi presided serenely. Bowie felt none of his strangeness with this gracious lady. Without realizing it, he classified her in that rare company of exceptional women, with his mother, Maggie and Mrs. Kirk.

He had a spontaneous humor with the children, too. The two eldest were girls, Ursula and Theresa, eighteen and

seventeen, but as long as he regarded them as children he felt no restraint. To the Veramendi girls he was a big brother.

They teased him outrageously.

Jim had decided to buy land here and discussed it with Don Juan.

"I don't mean another colony like Austin's. I want to develop a hacienda, become a part of the life here."

"It is very simple now. Under the republic the immigration laws have been relaxed," Veramendi told him. "Only three things are necessary: an oath to support the Mexican government; witnesses to your good character and recognition of the State church. We are all Catholics here, you know."

Jim hesitated over this last requirement. He had never been especially religious; but his mother was a devout Methodist and he had been raised in that faith. "I reckon I think all churches are good." he said. "It never seemed very important to me which one a man chose." In the end he joined the church.

Don Juan and Doña Josepha stood at his side as his sponsors.

Bowie bought two tracts of land. The de la Garzas sold him five labors, irrigated fields near town. From the Seguins he acquired two sitios about thirty miles down the river. This was grazing land, not far from the Flores hacienda. A labor was 177 acres and a sitio was a square league of 4,338.18 acres.

There was another Indian raid in late spring; this time he had no trouble enlisting as large a company as he chose. The stolen horses were recovered and he found himself looking forward to his return to the Veramendi Palace with pleasure. That he thought much of Ursula didn't surprise him. This had developed naturally. It was quite apart from his old distrust of women; he didn't think of her as grown up.

Don Juan Veramendi greeted him with a warm Spanish *abrazo.*

"Welcome home, my son. We've missed you."

"I'm glad to be back. How is everyone?"

"Right now they're getting into their finery and I won't tell them you're here or it would delay dinner. They can greet you later. We have American guests tonight and you can help us put them at ease."

Jim didn't think to question about these visitors. He hurried to his room, calling to a servant to fetch him a tub of water and lay out his best linen. His room was in the long north wing from which an outside stairway led down into the patio. By the time he was ready a dozen people were there and Ursula stood at the foot of the steps, smiling up at him.

She was blond and slender, her yellow hair coiled about her head, her brown eyes aglow.

The Spanish don't have many blondes, but when they do—— She'll break many a heart when she grows up, he thought.

Then he stopped in his tracks. Why, she is grown up! He stared at her silently, noting the maturity of her body for the first time.

"What is delaying you, Jaime?" she called. "I'm waiting to welcome you home. We thought you'd never come."

She clung to his arm as they crossed the garden. He resented that without knowing why. It made him so aware of her; her wide skirts brushed his ankle. The little girl he had liked was gone; they wouldn't be the same again. He felt a little sad.

These reflections so occupied his mind he didn't see Aaron Hodges until his name was called.

"Jim Bowie! I don't believe you've ever met my wife. This is the famous Jim Bowie, my dear. The man they named the knife after, though I must admit I do not believe half of the tales they tell."

Jim bowed to Sybil. Will I never get away from her? he thought.

"We're old friends," Hodges continued. "Why, Bowie was with me when I selected our land."

His eyes are as hard as ever, thought Sybil. Why did he have to come here? I hate him.

Aloud she said, "We hear a great deal about your fights, Mr. Bowie."

"Your Indian battles she means." Aaron spoke hastily.

"It's his duels that have made him famous, Aaron."

"There are worse things than killing a man in a fair fight," said Bowie abruptly. "Much worse."

Suddenly he was glad that Ursula was at his side. She was beautiful. Sybil had never been so lovely, and it gratified him that she should see him like this with another woman.

"Please excuse us, Aaron. I must pay my respects to Doña Josepha. I'll see you later. Come, my dear," he said. "Your mother is waiting."

For just a second as he turned her, his arm was about her waist.

He wanted Sybil to see that possessive gesture. Ursula noticed it. too. Her cheeks reddened when she glanced at him, but there was a happy light in her eyes.

# 12

## *A Legend Grows*

URSULA had grown up. Her hand on his arm reminded him, she was clutching him so tightly. The memories Sybil had revived made him look at her in a new way. She was fragile, a man could span her waist with his two hands, but this wasn't the slightness of a child. He could see the curves of a woman's body beneath the thin dress. He stiffened unconsciously, rebelled against her nearness. It will never be the same between us again. I've lost my little friend, he thought. Unreasoningly, he blamed Sybil for this discovery.

He remained away from Ursula the rest of the evening. Once he saw her watching him across the room. The troubled look of her eyes bothered him. She reminded him of a hurt child. No matter. She's a woman now. She'll be wise in their ways soon enough, he told himself.

It was hard to avoid her, living in the same house. He stayed away often and this wasn't difficult. Since his sorties against the Indians he had acquired a nickname in San Antonio, *Leoncito,* the young lion, and those lucky enough to be in his company styled themselves *Los Leoncitos* proudly. This embarrassed him a little. When the company took on a permanent status he called them the Rangers but the Mexicans preferred their own name. *Los Leoncitos* grew to be almost as much a social club as a military organization. Its ranks were filled with the sons of the great families. Horsemanship, hunting were their natural sports. They were trained for such a service, had lacked only the natural leader they found in Jim Bowie. He responded to their affection surprisingly, was mellowed by it. Only at the Veramendis was he ill at ease. When Ursula tried to tease him in the old friendly way he grew silent. She's just the age Sybil was, he thought when he was alone. I wish I could forget that.

He decided to leave. It's time I was getting back to Acadia, anyway. Rez will wonder what's happened to me. When I return here I'll get a house of my own, then she won't be underfoot all the time. Everything will be all right.

The Veramendis were saddened by the news. "I thought you were happy here," said Don Juan. "You've become a part of our family, my son. We don't like to think of your absence."

"I'll be back," Jim promised.

Ursula wore a special dress the night before his departure. It was white satin, the bodice cut low, the skirt full, and there was a mantilla to match it. It was a disappointing evening for Ursula. If Jim noticed the new dress he gave no sign.

Jim had seen several Bowie knives in Texas made by Captain Fitzpatrick. In New Orleans he was surprised to discover the fame of the weapon. He saw several of them displayed in a shop window and went in to investigate. "Genuine Bowie Knife," it said on the blade, "made in Manchester, England." It was much like the original, the blade a little broader and the hilt emphasized, but it had the same two-bladed point.

"The handiest weapon on the frontier," declared the clerk. "A man isn't properly armed unless he has one. Of course you can get one made right here in New Orleans, but this is good English steel, my friend. I think they make the best Bowie knives of all."

Jim pulled out his own weapon and laid it beside the other for comparison.

"I have one."

"Mind if I see it?" The clerk examined it closely. "Not a bad copy," he finally admitted.

Jim was chuckling to himself as he walked out.

A packet now ran up Red River as far as the falls at Alexandria. He was surprised at the growing luxury of these craft. The main saloon was gilt and plush, and a card game was in progress. Only five men were at the table but a dozen watched and that attracted his attention. "What's all the excitement?" he asked a bystander.

"Those gamblers are out to fleece that boy and they're doing a quick job of it, too."

Jim edged his way into the crowd. The youngster was Tom Wells, son of the general. "You mean he's up against a bunch of sharps?"

"That's Quest himself," his informant explained, "and some of his crew. There's no worse man on the river."

Bowie walked to the table and clapped young Wells on the shoulder.

"How's it going, son?"

"Why. hello. Mr. Jim. I'm glad to see you, sir. Maybe you'll change my luck for me. I'm not doing so well."

Bowie looked at the gold on the table. "Let me take your hand, son. I'll see what I can do."

Quest objected.

"No one invited you to take a hand."

"Who invited you?" Jim demanded.

"Maybe you don't understand, stranger. I'm Simon Quest."

"You probably never heard of me, but my name's Jim Bowie. and I'm sitting in this game."

He was not prepared for the magic of his name. When he mentioned it. one of the gamblers rose. Quest hesitated, then followed his companion to his feet. "I guess the game's over," he said.

Jim spread his hands across the gold on the table. "Not until this boy has a chance to win back his money."

"So you're saying the game was crooked, are you?"

"It's you who're doing the talking. I just insist that we have a chance to win back this money. The boy can't afford to lose it."

Quest went for the pistol in his belt. With a quick shove Jim sent the table spinning. It knocked the gambler and his companion down. Taking advantage of the surprise. Jim pounced on Quest. disarming him. "If it's a fight you want you can have that too."

The gambler rose slowly. "You're armed now and I'm not."

Bowie handed the pistol to young Wells. "If any of his

friends try to interfere, shoot," he said. Then slowly, his arms outspread, he turned toward Quest.

The action which followed took him by surprise. His opponent was watching for an advantage. He drew a knife and leaped while Jim was talking. Bowie kicked hard, breaking the rush, drew his own knife as he darted under the other's guard, slashed up as the man staggered toward him.

The fight was ended in a few seconds.

A friend knelt beside the dead gambler.

"How much did you lose, Tom?" Bowie asked.

"Three thousand dollars. It was cotton money."

Jim stared at the gold spilled on the floor. It seemed about the right amount. "Does anyone else have a claim to this money?" he asked.

No one answered.

"Pick it up, Tom," he said.

The Bowie legend was growing.

# 13

## *Have I Not Called Thee Son?*

ACADIA had prospered. There were nearly two thousand acres in cultivation now. Yet Rezin was willing to sell when Jim revealed his plans. "We're still partners, you know," he said.

"That won't be necessary, Rez. I've plenty of capital without that and this is a good investment. Once I'm properly established in Texas, it would be good to have you near. We'll consider it then. Hang on to Acadia for the present."

Plans for his Texas establishment occupied him. He bought plantation equipment, furniture too. "I'll have my own house. I can't go on living at the Veramendis forever." The quantity of his new possessions made an overland trip impossible.

He returned by ship, landed at Matagorda Bay and hired eight wagons to freight his belongings. He rode ahead, impatient of their slow pace.

One thing surprised him at Matagorda. Since the overthrow of Spain, Mexico's attitude toward settlers had been friendly. There had been occasional friction, not serious and easily adjusted, but this time he encountered a garrison here. The commandant threatened to turn him back until he was identified by a friend as *Leoncito,* the godson of Juan Veramendi, but two settlers from New Orleans on the same boat were denied entry. He didn't like the sound of this, and yet he was pleased to learn that Juan Veramendi had been made vice-governor of Texas. That was a change long needed. Since Coahuila and Texas had been combined into a single state, Texians had felt neglected. This would be mended now and, remembering Don Juan's wise kindliness, Jim was encouraged. Where could they have found a better man?

In the happiness of his welcome he thought San Anto-

nio unchanged. Don Juan insisted that he make the Veramendi Palace his home.

"But I brought my own furniture this time," he protested. "I'm going to live here now."

"That will take time." The governor beamed at the news. "Until then this is your home, my son."

Jim wanted land and was surprised to learn of the new restrictions against settlers. Don Juan explained recent developments. "There is so much talk in the United States of annexing Texas that Mexico is beginning to look with suspicion upon your countrymen. Our government fears trouble. That's the reason behind the new laws. They're also trying to colonize the state with Mexicans to restore the balance, and that's bad, too."

"What's wrong with that?"

Don Juan grimaced. "They are conscripting them, these colonists. You know what that means. They're sending us the riffraff, the sweepings of their cities. Do you think we welcome settlers of that breed?"

Formerly, requirements for Mexican citizenship had been made lax for settlers. Restrictions had tightened, but the vice-governor made things easy. Jim had already joined the Catholic Church. Only two other formalities remained: a certificate of character required of all new citizens and the oath of allegiance to Mexico. The Navarros, the Flores, the Seguins, the de la Garzas, all the great families came to vouch for Bowie as a desirable citizen. Jim took the oath of Mexican allegiance soberly.

"A man owes his loyalty to the place he lives," he told Don Juan. "I don't want to shirk my responsibilities."

Still the oath was difficult. When he looked at the Mexican colors on the wall he remembered another flag and the words came hard.

With Veramendi's approval no objection was raised when he purchased one hundred sitios from private owners in the country north of San Antonio, extending all the way to the Comal River. He also found another tract half that size adjoining the land he previously had bought to the south, and added it to his holdings. "That's where I'm going to

build my hacienda," he said. It was close to the Seguins and he liked that.

His furniture had arrived but had not been uncrated. He still made his home with the Veramendis when in town, but these busy days that was seldom. He looked forward to these visits.

Often he spent an extra day in the saddle for the sake of one night spent in this home, yet he was quietest in this house he loved best.

At first Ursula was again the little sister of earlier days here. She was gay, bantering, and he responded with casual good nature. It didn't last. She'll be nineteen soon, he would remind himself. I'm surprised she isn't married already. If I weren't so old—or if only she were ten or twelve years older.

One morning Don Juan asked him to his office.

"What's wrong, my son?" the governor began. "Remember I am your godfather. If you are in trouble this is the place to come."

"Why, there's nothing wrong. I'm happy here, Don Juan."

"If I have given offense it was not intentional," Veramendi continued gravely. "Remember I regard you as a son."

*"Padre mio!"* exclaimed Bowie. "You could not give offense."

"Surely it can't be money. If it is, all I have is yours."

Jim shook his head.

"No, not money, Father."

"Then perhaps it is—a girl?"

"No, Father, no. I mean yes. Yes, it is a girl, but I—I am old and she's only a child. I'll be thirty-five in the spring and she's just nineteen. She'd never give me a thought."

Don Juan's kindly eyes crinkled at the corners. "Perhaps she will be the best judge of that." He clapped Bowie's shoulder affectionately. "There is not one in San Antonio who doesn't adore you already. Now you run along and speak to her father or I'll do it for you."

Bowie gulped.

"It's Ursula," he said finally. "Now you can see how impossible it is."

Veramendi chuckled. "Impossible? Have I not already called thee son?"

The wedding date was set for spring. Jim was dazed by Ursula's happiness. He had not dared to guess that she shared his longing. Where before he had found excuses for staying away from San Antonio, now nothing could make him leave.

"We must buy a house and equip it. We must get everything ready."

"But our hacienda, Jaime," Ursula reminded him. "I thought you were in such a hurry to build it."

"That must wait, Ursulita. The town house comes first. Besides, I've no mind to leave you now. I want you with me when we go to the country."

The Veramendis had a summer home at mountainous Saltillo, capital of the twin state of Coahuila south of the Rio Grande and, since 1824, capital of Texas, too. Cotton spinning was a thriving industry in Saltillo. This interested Bowie.

"It's another job for a steam engine," he told Don Juan. "We run a sugar mill with steam; why can't it be used here? There's a fortune in it for us."

Bowie wrote two letters and entrusted them to a traveler bound for Louisiana. In one he invited Rezin and Maggie to the wedding. The second was to the manufacturer in Cincinnati who had made the steam sugar mill for him. inquiring about another for cotton spinning. Its answer was forwarded from his New Orleans banker in care of a ship captain and he hurried to Don Juan with it.

"There is a firm in Boston which has already made a cotton mill. My letter was forwarded to them and they'll duplicate the mill for us for $15,000. I'm ordering it today. We'll set it up in Saltillo and be partners, you and I."

"It was your idea, Jaime. I want no share in your enterprise."

"We're partners in it," Bowie insisted. "The mill shall

be part of my marriage settlement on Ursula. I'll have it no other way."

He bought a stone house on Soledad Street for a town home. The wedding was the largest in the old town's history. The outlying haciendas were deserted as all the great families moved in for the event. The governor proclaimed a week of fiesta. There was wine for everyone at the governor's expense, and *Los Leoncitos* staged public contests in horsemanship. Even the Indians came in for them. Xolic, the Lipan chieftain, brought Jim a belt studded with silver as a wedding present.

"Where do they get this silver?" Jim asked Don Juan.

"They're supposed to have a rich mine of it in the San Saba country," was the answer. "But no white man has ever been able to locate it."

There were two wedding ceremonies. First, the civil one before the acting alcalde, José Maria Salines, at which the contract was signed, then the ceremony at San Fernando Cathedral.

Father Refugio de la Garza, who had previously baptized Bowie, was the priest. As Jim knelt beside his bride, the couple were veiled in the face of the church, according to ancient custom, when the priest covered them both with a humeral veil during the ceremony.

"As long as we both shall live," Jim whispered to Ursula as they left the cathedral.

"Yes, Jaime," she replied. "As long as we live."

# 14

## *The San Saba Battle*

THE couple spent their honeymoon in Louisiana. Rezin was ready to sell Acadia now.

"Ever since he came back from your wedding he's talked of nothing but Texas," said Maggie. "I believe he'd leave tomorrow if he had a buyer."

"I have a buyer. It's a Mississippi syndicate, headed by Congressman Robert Walker. They'll pay us ninety thousand dollars for this place."

Jim showed his astonishment. "That's a lot of money."

"The biggest price ever paid for a plantation in Louisiana," Rezin declared proudly. "And worth every penny of it, too."

They discussed the sale soberly. Jim was dubious about his brother's plan. "Texas is changing, Rez. No telling what's going to happen. There's trouble ahead. They're trying to keep new settlers from crossing the border. There were two decrees issued last year. One prohibits settlers from owning slaves and the other prohibits foreign immigrants from settling in Mexican territory and even dispossesses some landowners who aren't on the regular grants."

"But there are thousands of Americans already there, Jim. Why, Austin's colony alone has fifteen hundred families."

"I know. And they're having trouble." Jim explained the difficulties. "The fault isn't all on one side. Constant talk of annexing Texas to the United States has worried Mexico. That's why they've slammed the door on further immigration and you can't blame 'em. When the immigrants start smuggling and flouting laws that doesn't help either."

They finally decided to sell Acadia. Rezin was to move his family to Opelousas for the present and come on to Texas alone in the summer. "We'll look around and see what the prospects are by then," Jim promised. "Veramendi

is a fair man and the settlers' friend. They pass these laws in Mexico City and that's a long way from Texas. When they're bad he simply forgets they exist. As long as we have him, there'll be no trouble."

The Bowies were back in San Antonio by mid-June but they didn't move into the house Jim had waiting. Two momentous items changed their plans. The first was that Ursula was expecting a baby. Then Don Juan received word that the cotton machinery had arrived at Matamoros.

It was decided that the entire family should move to Saltillo for the summer. "Just the thing for Ursula," her father declared when he learned of her pregnancy. "The climate's much better."

It was a busy time. New adobe buildings were erected to house the machinery and mechanics trained in its use. Jim had never worked so hard but he didn't mind. Ursula was always waiting for him at Casa Veramendi, and the family had decided to remain there for the winter to be with her. Don Juan was needed in San Antonio on official business in the fall. He planned to go alone until Jim received word that Rezin had arrived there.

"He wants to inspect land, Ursula, and I promised him that we'd look for the silver mine in the San Saba country. He's been thinking of that ever since he saw the belt that Xolic gave me. It won't take long and I'll hurry back. I won't waste time when I'm coming to you."

Rezin had brought a company of seven men with him, sturdy frontiersmen, dependable in an expedition into the Indian country. He also had a mulatto boy, Charles, as his personal servant. Jim was accompanied by his own *mozo*, a youth named Gonzales. With six pack animals driven by the two servants, the seven men enrolled by Rezin and the two Bowie brothers rode out of San Antonio in early November.

They bore toward the San Saba River, exploring as they went, always alert for some sign of an Indian mine. They met no Indians and proceeded without incident until the morning of November 19 when they were overtaken by two Comanches and a Mexican. The Indians belonged to

a hunting party headed by Chief Isaonie, and said they had rescued their companion from a war party of Lipans. Isaonie also sent word that he had captured stolen horses and was returning them to San Antonio. The others were suspicious; Jim knew Isaonie and he questioned the Mexican who corroborated the story. "They are telling the truth," he said. "You have nothing to fear from these fellows."

For an hour they smoked and visited and he gave the Indians presents of tobacco and powder when they left. Next morning, while they were at breakfast a horseman galloped into camp, his horse jaded, the rider evidently spent.

It was the Mexican they'd seen the previous day.

"Isaonie sent me." He displayed the silver medal which the chief usually wore about his neck. "He said for me to tell Jim Bowie that a hundred and twenty-four Towackanie and forty Caddo Indians are on his trail. He met them last night and tried to persuade them to stop. He told them *Leoncito* was here and it would be bad for them, but they said it was better to catch you now without your company."

"Did you see this war party?"

"*Si,* señor. Isaonie is telling you the truth. He is camped on the Llano River and has only sixteen men, but he said if you could reach him his braves would fight with you."

"Not much chance of reaching the Llano River with that many Indians in the way." Jim turned to his companions. "There's an old Spanish fort on the San Saba River about thirty miles from here," he told them. "There are some stout stone walls left. That's the best place to make a stand if we have to."

The others agreed. They broke camp swiftly and soon were headed for the San Saba, driving the pack horses before them at a sharp trot. The messenger who warned them elected to return to Isaonie.

"One man can get through. I can make it back and they won't attack the Comanches," he explained.

It was rocky country. By midafternoon the unshod horses

were tender-footed. "How far's that old fort, Jim?" Rezin asked.

"We won't make it tonight, Rez. It's fully ten miles off yet. I'll ride ahead and find us a camp."

He located a spot to his liking, a grove of thirty or forty live oaks, their trunks about the size of a man's body. Just to the north of it was a dense oak thicket with bushes about ten feet high. This was about forty yards long and half as wide, while a small stream flowed to the west about forty yards away. It was the best they could do. Water was close, there was cover and they were surrounded by open prairie with only a few scattered trees and rocks. The trail they were following ran east of the camp. Under his direction they prepared the place for defense. They cut a trail through the thicket about ten feet from the edge, over which they might maneuver easily and yet remain unseen by an enemy outside. The horses were hobbled in the grove. Every available bucket was filled with water and pickets were established before they settled down.

When the night passed uneventfully Bowie grew hopeful that they might make the abandoned fort after all. The horses were saddled and they were ready to move out when they first saw the Indians, still about two hundred yards distant. One man walked ahead, crouching over the trail, headed straight for their camp. His companions, mounted, followed a short distance behind. Each party discovered the other at about the same moment.

"There are some Caddos among 'em." Bowie pointed them out by the cut of their hair. "They've always been friendly. Maybe we can talk some sense into 'em. With odds at a hundred and sixty-four to eleven we'd better try."

Rezin spoke some Caddo. It was decided that he and Dave Buchanan should walk forward for a parley with the Indians while their friends, with Jim in command, kept them covered. Each weapon was loaded and ready as the two started. When they were forty yards from the war party Rezin stopped and asked the Indians to send forward their chief for a parley.

No one came. Instead, this was a signal for a curious chorus of "How-de-do, how-de-do," after which a dozen shots were fired. Buchanan fell with a broken leg. Rezin was untouched. Their friends among the trees immediately opened fire to cover the retreat and he made his way slowly back, carrying Buchanan on his shoulders. Buchanan was wounded twice more before they reached shelter. When Rezin didn't fall, eight Indians rushed forward trying to cut him off. Jim led a sortie against them, shooting down four of the enemy; the others fell back.

"Wallace and Armstrong, take post in the thicket," Jim ordered. "Everybody else find a tree. Scatter out. They'll surround us first and then we'll get their rush." He placed the wounded Buchanan under the care of the two servant boys.

The next attack came from a slight hill about sixty yards northeast of the grove. Except for one chief who rode calmly back and forth urging them on, the Indians were afoot. They met a steady fire as they swarmed over the crest.

"Who's loaded?" Jim called when he spotted this chief.

"I am," replied Cephas Hamm, a seasoned frontier fighter.

"Then kill that Indian on the horse."

Hamm fired. The bullet passed through the chief's leg, breaking it, killed the horse. The Indian pulled himself free and hopped around the fallen animal, brandishing his shield as if it might fend off rifle bullets. By now other weapons were ready. The chief fell in this volley. Other Indians tried to carry off their fallen leader. Five of these were killed, too, before they disappeared over the hill.

"They'll be back," Jim warned. "Get every gun loaded."

He was right. The next charge came from the same direction and again was met by a withering volley. Another chief was mounted now, directing the attack. Little Charles, Rezin's servant, came running with Buchanan's unused rifle and handed it to Jim when his was empty. With it he brought down the second leader. The attack was repulsed, but under its cover fifteen or twenty Caddos had reached

the creek bank to the rear and now opened fire. One man, Doyle, went down in this blast, a bullet entering his left breast and passing out the back.

"Where'd that shot come from?" Tom McCaslin asked, and whirled to face this new front.

"Take cover," Rezin warned. "No sense in exposing yourself."

Before he could obey McCaslin saw an Indian lurking along the creek and raised his gun to fire, but the Caddo shot too fast. The bullet passed through the center of his body.

Bob Armstrong made the same mistake.

"Damn that Indian. Where is he?" He reached his dead friend's side.

"Won't you ever learn?" Jim shouted. "Get down." His warning was emphasized by another shot which shattered Armstrong's gunstock.

He was unhurt, however.

The Indians had the camp completely encircled now. There were no more rushes; instead they slowly closed in, taking advantage of every rock and shrub for cover. Bowie ordered the grove abandoned. The wounded, the servants and the horses were moved into the thicket first; the rest followed cautiously. Two men were detailed to watch the creek bank. The enemy there was in point-blank range. The others took advantage of the path cut through the thicket. They had freedom of movement, could see the Indians and remain unseen themselves.

However, each time a gun blazed a volley came in answer, always aimed at the rifle's smoke.

"They're trying to outsmart us," said Jim. "Remember the minute you fire, move. That's how they're spotting us."

This phase of the fighting lasted for hours. Jim Coryell was wounded next, a bullet passing through his arm and lodging in his side.

As the defending force withered, the servant boys were busied loading the rifles of the wounded.

"Don't let 'em guess we're hurt," Jim soberly advised. "Half the men will just have to shoot twice as fast."

They were encouraged because the fire from the creek bank had been silenced.

The wind was from the southwest. The Indians' next strategy was to start a fire in the dry grass in an attempt to drive the whites from cover and also to provide a smoke screen for themselves. Fortunately the wind veered slightly. The fire burned its way to the creek, and stopped, leaving a stretch of unburned sod around the stronghold. Jim Bowie was worried by this fire. There was still a dangerous stretch of unburned grass should the wind shift again and there was little defense against such an attack. The wounded were carried back to the grove and Charles and Gonzales, the two servants, instructed to scrape a bare path around them. There was no grass here but dry leaves were plentiful. They would burn easily. He then ordered a parapet built. For this they used what stones they could find, together with uprooted bushes and a few fallen logs. The horses and stores were placed behind this crude wall, the leaves were scraped away from its front as a defense against fire.

They worked frantically in shifts while their comrades stood guard. By the time the third attack came the breastworks in the grove were three feet high and provided considerable shelter.

The attack was general this time, coming from all sides as the Indians closed in, but the Bowie party was able to hold its own again. They were so busily engaged they didn't notice the shift in the wind until one Caddo succeeded in reaching the creek and setting fire to the unburned grass which still protected them there. Armstrong spotted him and shot him through the body, but the damage had been done. The wind was brisk now. Behind the wall of flames the Indians, triumphant now, started a chorus of yells. The smoke was dense. Jim feared a final assault was gathering behind it.

The air was filled with sparks.

"Hold your fire," he ordered. "Any man who opens his powder horn in all this is inviting an explosion. When they

come we'll give 'em one volley and from then on it must be knife work."

The Indians didn't charge, however. They were confident of success now and waited for their prey to be driven into the open. The cleared space around the bulwark saved them. With doused blankets they fought the flames from this cleared ring, finally beating them out, their action protected from enemy fire by the smoke. The thicket to the north was gone, however. It was sundown; the unequal battle had lasted for thirteen hours and still the Bowie party held out.

Except by moonlight Indians seldom attack at night and they were discouraged. They withdrew beyond rifleshot and the beleaguered men, watching, saw them prepare to make camp.

"All right. Now's our chance to build the breastworks higher," Jim admonished. "Get at it if you want to ride out of here alive."

They worked desperately. By midnight their fortification was breast-high. They also filled every bucket and skin in camp with water from the creek as soon as it was dark. In the distance the Indians had set up their death chant, their yells quavering throughout the night. None of the men sheltered in the grove expected the next attack to be delayed beyond dawn. They continued strengthening their position as they waited.

When day came there was no sign of Indians. Their camp was deserted. After waiting cautiously for more than an hour Jim took Cephas Hamm and scouted the Indian position. There were many bloody spots on the grass. They counted seventy where dead or wounded had lain, but there was no sign of the enemy. On their side they had lost one killed and three wounded. But the odds were still so great against them that they dared not move beyond their fort. Shortly after noon a small party of Indians came back to scout the ground but fled quickly when Bowie ordered a volley fired at them. That was the last time they were troubled.

They remained in the grove for eight days until their wounded were able to travel. Buchanan's injured leg had mortified. "Looks like he's goin' to lose it," Hamm said. Gonzales knew a Mexican remedy. He boiled a thick tea of live-oak bark, thickened it with pounded charcoal and Indian meal, made a poultice around the leg with this medicine and then sewed it up in a buffalo skin. They didn't look at it for five days—during those days they were on the trail trying to get back to San Antonio—but when they next examined the wound the infection was gone. Armstrong didn't lose his leg.

They were twelve days returning. When they rode into town the cathedral bell rang in their honor. Comanches had brought in the story of their fight. It was already known here.

The Comanches claimed eighty-two of the attacking Indians had been killed or wounded, most of them killed. Their reports came from the survivors of the war party.

"That was a fight," Juan Seguin told Jim. "Too bad *Los Leoncitos* weren't there. San Saba will always be the most famous Indian battle in Texas."

# 15

## *A Crusader*

DON JUAN VERAMENDI was still in San Antonio when Jim returned. Troubled conditions had delayed his return to Saltillo. "This is really a test between the democratic government we set up ten years ago and a return to the old military rule of the Royalists," the vice-governor explained. "Here in Texas it's taken a peculiar form. Mexico City fears loss of Texas to the United States and is abusing the settlers. That isn't the real issue though. Either Mexico will remain free under its constitution or there will be a return to despotism. That's what bothers me."

Jim knew how earnestly Veramendi had tried to settle these differences. The harsher restrictions of Mexico City were ignored here. The state authorities had kept faith with the colonists. His father-in-law and Governor José Letona, who had been his best man, were sincere friends of the Texians.

"I want you to see Aaron Hodges, Jaime," Don Juan urged. "He's a man of great influence. We need him on our side. Right now the colonists are angry and are committing acts which cannot be ignored for long. These must be checked. Hodges must counsel patience. Tell him we will work out a settlement if they give us time. I send him my word for that personally. The trouble is the extremists on both sides are driving us into a trouble from which there can be no retreat. That's what I wish to avoid."

"I had hoped to join Ursula at once, Father. Can't this wait a little longer?"

"I'm sorry, my son. Further delay is impossible. The federal government has refused to confirm the titles of independent settlers and wants them driven out. Governor Letona and I realized this was unjust; also it infringed the state rights guaranteed us under the constitution, so we sent

Francisco Madero and José Maria Carbajal as commissioner and surveyor to grant the required titles and protect the Texians. General Teran has upset all this. He has had our commissioners arrested and thrown into jail at Anahuac. The settlers are angry. I fear trouble. Someone must calm them and who can do it better than you and Aaron Hodges?"

Jim rode northeast, straight for the Hodges plantation. It was Sybil who came to the door.

"My husband isn't here." She didn't ask him in. "He's away at Brazoria, defending his rights."

"Then I'll have to go there. He can defend them better by staying home."

"It's easy for you to talk," she flared. "You with your high connections. Nobody's threatening the title to your land."

Bowie arrived in Brazoria on Christmas Eve, too late for the indignation meeting held eight days before. The Texians had sent commissioners to Davis Bradburn at Anahuac, protesting the order closing all but that single port in Texas. He had taken the arbitrary action because of flagrant smuggling, in protest of the import tax. Hodges had been one of these commissioners.

"Bradburn grumbled and asked for time but when we threatened to take up arms unless something was done; when he saw we meant business, he finally agreed that Brazoria should stay open too," Hodges reported.

"The worst thing you could have done, Aaron." Bowie tried to reason with his friend. "Provoking a war won't settle anything. That's why I came to you. You're a man of judgment. Surely you understand the need for calm leadership now. Stephen Austin is a brilliant man. Ask him. He'll give you the same advice."

"You see only the Mexican side of it, Bowie."

"You forget we're all Mexicans here now, Aaron. We all passed our word to become loyal citizens and in return Mexico gave us rich opportunities. Don't forget that."

"Then where's the title to my land?" Hodges demanded.

Bowie met the same arguments everywhere. Men always

listened to Jim Bowie. But though some agreed with him, he had come too late to influence the majority.

Hodges told him this. "The colonists have come here to fight. They closed their minds to reason when they picked up their rifles. In this mood, they wouldn't listen to Stephen Austin himself."

"They'll listen to you, Aaron."

"When they won't heed Jim Bowie there's no sense in anyone else trying," his friend replied. "And if you'll take my advice, you'll stay out of this now. I've already heard men say you have gone over to the Mexican side."

"Good God, man," Bowie repeated angrily. "We're all Mexican citizens now."

Hodges shrugged. He believed in Jim Bowie but not in his cause. He still wasn't sure of the title to his plantation.

Tom Andrews was a burly, red-faced settler with massive paws at the end of furry arms. He didn't know Bowie and didn't like his talk. "What are you—a Mexican-lover?" he snarled.

"Yes," Bowie replied. "I have every reason to be."

"Why, you damned skunk, I've a good mind to bash yore head in." He lunged at Jim but was intercepted by his friends.

"You fool," one warned. "That's Jim Bowie."

Andrews was past caution now. "I might 'a' knowed. Jim Bowie!" He spat derisively. "I hyar he even sleeps with a Mexican wench."

Jim was white with fury. He struck Andrews across the face before he'd finished his sentence. Friends tried to separate the two, crowding between them, but not before Andrews had gripped Jim's wrist. When the settler saw the contrast between his own hairy fist and the slender hand he held, he laughed. "Turn me loose, boys. I'll break 'im in two. He boasts he's good with a knife. All right, give me one and watch me carve 'im to ribbons."

Jim wrenched free. All his calm was gone. "Give him a knife," he raged. "He's said some words I want to cut out of his throat."

"Ye'll fight on my terms," Andrews demanded.

"Any terms you choose."

"Then we'll fight straddlin' a log," declared the settler triumphantly. He was confident of his own strength.

"I agree," Bowie retorted crisply.

Andrews hesitated, worried by Bowie's willingness. "Ye didn't let me finish. We'll fight straddlin' a log, face to face, with our shirttails nailed down. Nobody's goin' to run away from this."

Jim was contemptuous of the weird terms.

"No one's going to run. I said I'd fight on any terms you chose."

Each contestant was unarmed as his shirt was nailed securely to the log. They sat face to face, their knees touching.

"When you're handed your knives I will count three. Until then you won't move. Understand?" A colonist named John Austin was in charge of arrangements. "I don't like these terms anyway and I'll shoot the man who violates them," he warned. He held a pistol in his hand.

At a signal the knives were handed both men simultaneously. The crowd fell silent.

"One," counted Austin.

The great muscles in Andrews' arm bulged. Neither man moved. Each gripped his knife at his side, just as he had received it.

"Two."

Already Andrews was smiling, confident of his strength. His cunning had given him the advantage. Bowie might be faster, trickier, but there was no chance of that now.

"Three."

At the word Andrews raised his knife high for its savage plunge. With his left hand he gripped for Bowie's throat. His eyes were alight with triumph. Bowie seemed not to have moved.

There was no strength in his fingers as the blade descended. Jim caught its force with his upstretched arm. Andrews uttered no sound. He simply collapsed swiftly.

Had Juan Seguin been there he could have told them the answer. It was the old instruction in knife fighting which Bowie had given *Los Leoncitos*. The settler had raised his

arm to strike a long chopping stroke from above, Indian fashion.

There had been no lost motion in Jim's blow. His blade had found its mark with its upward swing.

Friends hacked his shirttail free so he could stand. He was covered with the blood of the man who had insulted Ursula.

Bowie rode back to Saltillo. It was winter, the going was bad, but Ursula's time was near. Jim's son was born on the fifteenth of February.

"He'll have the name of the two finest men I know," he told Ursula. "Juan for your father, Rezin for mine. Juan Rezin Bowie. How do you like the sound of that?"

"Juan Rezin Bowie y Veramendi," his wife repeated after him, using the old Spanish custom of adding the mother's name. "I like it very much, Jaime."

# 16

## *Open Warfare*

FIVE years had been kind to Hodges. His plantation was among the best in the country, and he was proud of Sybil. She loved Jody, he knew. The girls delighted him, too. Jacqueline was fifteen; Camille was a year younger and his favorite. It wasn't just her beauty—her head was a mass of yellow curls—it was her affectionate way. He liked to fancy himself her real father when she cuddled in his arms. He had hoped for other children; kept his disappointment to himself when they failed to arrive. If he was sometimes lonely there was always Camille to fling herself impetuously into his arms.

In May Bradburn proclaimed all land lying within ten leagues of the coast under martial law. Continued smuggling and revolution against the arbitrary government in Mexico were given as the reasons. Garrisons of conscript troops were to enforce the measure. As soon as Hodges heard of this he hurried to Anahuac to join other angry settlers in protest.

Among these men Aaron Hodges was a conservative and yet, strangely enough, he formed a quick attachment for the leader of the radical party which was demanding action. William Barrett Travis, only twenty-two, already was a man of charm with a ready laugh, dancing blue eyes and crisp red hair. They became fast friends.

He was awakened one morning by Travis hammering at the door. "Our hour has struck." Melodramatic phrases fell easily from this young lawyer's lips. "Now Texas will arise."

"What's happened?"

"Some of Bradburn's conscripts have outraged a woman in the neighborhood. We've just discovered it. Get on your clothes and come quickly."

Travis was making a speech from the tavern steps when

Hodges joined him. His phrases were grandiloquent; the breathless crowd shouted encouragement. No one heard the approach of the soldiers. The mob's first intimation came when they were ordered to surrender. None did. Some fought with their fists; others taken by surprise scrambled to get away.

Several shots were fired in the brief melee but none was wounded. Travis and several other ringleaders were captured and marched sullenly off to jail.

Aaron Hodges realized this was the spark which might set the settlements ablaze. He remembered Bowie's warning and yet he remembered Travis, too, and sympathized with him. He lingered in Anahuac, watched as the angry colonists gathered and chose Francis Johnson as their leader. They were determined the prisoners should be released. Hodges still hoped for peace until John Austin arrived at the head of a hundred armed men. "You're either with us or agin us," was his sharp way of putting it. "We've gone too far to back out now." Hodges joined them.

Austin had taken some prisoners. Bradburn had sent Lieutenant Miguel Nieto and a cavalry patrol out to reconnoiter. They had fallen into a trap baited by the settlers. For two days the garrison was besieged. Then Bradburn arranged a truce. He agreed to turn loose his prisoners providing Lieutenant Nieto and his cavalry were set free and the insurgents retired six miles from the town. The settlers retired to Turtle Bayou, but Bradburn then failed to keep his bargain. On hearing this the settlers held a meeting at their camp and passed resolutions favoring Santa Anna's revolt now in progress in Mexico.

The colonists were in earnest now but they needed artillery to conquer Bradburn. John Austin decided to fetch the cannon from the schooner *Sabine* at Brazoria; leaving most of his force to blockade the Anahuac garrison, he marched off with thirty men, among them Aaron Hodges. Colonel Ugartechea was at Fort Velasco at the mouth of the Brazoa River, with a garrison of one hundred and twenty-five men. He sent word that the schooner would not be allowed to leave the port.

"He can't stop us," Austin replied. "Either he joins us or we'll take Velasco."

He had one hundred and twelve volunteers at his disposal. First he chose the schooner *Brazoria* as the stoutest ship in port and placed forty men aboard. A bulwark of cotton bales was set up on deck to protect these marksmen and the schooner dropped down the river, anchoring two hundred yards offshore, opposite Velasco. Austin, with the remainder of his force, approached from the land side and sent a flag of truce to Ugartechea, informing him that they represented the Santa Anna insurrection and inviting him to join them in defense of the Mexican constitution.

"I'm a soldier," was the colonel's reply. "I don't take orders from a rabble."

Austin immediately opened fire. He had divided his troops into two columns, one under Hodges, the other under himself. His plan was to erect breastworks on the land side while the schooner kept the fort engaged on the other.

The marksmen on the *Brazoria,* protected by their cotton breastworks, fought with telling effect. Austin and Hodges had less success; their fortifications were inadequate and the fire from the fort was heavy. About nine o'clock in the morning they were driven from these entrenchments. It had begun to rain and the storm increased their discomfort. The men on the schooner continued the battle. Ugartechea had only one gun and the fire directed against it was accurate. Time after time his artillery crew was wiped out by the ship's unerring rifle fire. Ugartechea fought savagely, personally pointing his cannon when his gun crews failed. His conduct won the reluctant admiration of the *Brazoria's* crew. They refused to shoot him although they killed every man who tried to help him.

The contest lasted eleven hours. At that time the Mexican commander had exhausted his ammunition. He hoisted a white flag and agreed to surrender if he were allowed to evacuate the fort with the honors of war, his troops retaining their arms and equipment. They should be allowed to march to Matamoros unhindered.

Ugartechea's losses had been heavy, thirty-five killed

and fifteen wounded. The settlers had lost eleven killed and fifty-two wounded, and of these twelve more died. Among those buried in the shallow graves at Velasco was Aaron Hodges.

Travis brought Sybil the news. He had been released by Colonel Piedras, commander of the Nacogdoches garrison who had hurried to Anahuac at news of the trouble. When the settlers explained their complaints he had promised release of the prisoners and had compelled Bradburn to live up to his previous agreement.

"Your husband died in a great cause, Mrs. Hodges. The Mexican garrison has left Anahuac, Bradburn is deposed. We have won the first round."

Santa Anna's revolt in Mexico had every prospect of success. He had proclaimed in favor of the democratic constitution of 1824.

"This is the hope of Texas," Don Juan Veramendi told his son-in-law Al Saltillo. "That's what I've been trying to preserve, the constitution of 1824. Under it there's no reason for quarrels. We've seen how it works in the United States. It will do the same for Mexico." Convinced that Santa Anna was a true liberal, they decided to throw in their lot with him.

Bowie left Saltillo reluctantly; his son was only four months old. Don Juan was anxious to be off, however; and he wanted Bowie with him. "You and your *Leoncitos* will have work to do if there's trouble."

Surprisingly there was almost no opposition. Colonel José Mejia, ardent Santa Anna supporter, arrived in Texas by ship with four hundred men with orders to quell a Texas insurrection. Stephen Austin came with him and the colonists told their story. "We want only the rights guaranteed us by the constitution of 1824. We are loyal Mexicans, Colonel."

Mejia was satisfied. He hurried back to Tampico. Throughout Texas the Mexican garrisons, hearing this news, declared for Santa Anna. Only Colonel Piedras at Nacogdoches was defiant, and the colonists assembled a force there under James Bullock to drive him out.

Jim and his Indian Fighters arrived too late for the battle in Nacogdoches but encountered Piedras during his retreat at Anglena Creek. Bowie had only thirty men and Piedras led more than one hundred.

"Take cover along the stream. When they try to cross, let 'em have it," Jim ordered crisply. "We've got 'em where we want 'em."

Their volley caught Piedras in midstream. He was unable to rally his troops. That marked the final engagement of the revolution in Texas. Piedras troops revolted and turned him over to the Texians. Piedras was deported to New Orleans.

Sybil was the first person Jim met when he returned to San Antonio. He saw her waiting in the palace anteroom. He halted in surprise. "You're waiting for Aaron?"

"For Governor Veramendi. My husband was killed at Velasco."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Sybil. Can I help you?"

She stared at him steadily. "I must see Governor Veramendi. If you can help me do that——"

The door of Veramendi's office opened. When he saw Jim his arms spread for the *abrazo*. "Welcome home, Jaime. I don't even ask if you succeeded. I already know the answer."

"You remember Aaron Hodges? This is his widow."

Veramendi bowed. "At your service, señora. Please come in."

As Sybil crossed the room Jim remembered Hodges' trouble about the title to his land.

"Wait, Sybil." He acted on impulse. "If you care to sell your plantation I will buy it."

"It isn't for sale." She turned to the vice-governor. "I suppose you are able to settle the trouble about the title now, aren't you?"

Veramendi nodded. "Since the change in governments there is nothing to interfere. I will attend to it at once, Señora Hodges."

"I thought so." Her eyes were full of malice as she looked at Jim. "So that's why you're so eager to buy me out. I'm not interested in your generous offer, Mr. Bowie."

# 17

## *Bad News*

JIM BOWIE and his wife planned to stay in Saltillo through the summer. Don Juan was needed in San Antonio and it was best for one partner to remain here to look after the mills. Jim said nothing of the long-deferred plans for his hacienda. He still dreamed of it but it could wait. He would take Ursula with him this fall and they would select the site together. He wanted it that way. He yearned to share every thought with her; that completed his enjoyment of it.

He spent his mornings at the mills; they were doing well. By noon he was home to frolic with Juan and often Ursula was a merry third in this play. He seldom returned to his office after siesta. She noticed this. "You don't have to go back?" she asked once.

"I'd rather stay here with you."

Theirs was a Spanish household. It drowsed through the siesta hours. They didn't. Ursula welcomed the intimacy of these occasions when they were alone, contrived to look her daintiest for him. She learned to be as artful in dishabille as in her finest dinner dress.

They invented a game for siesta. "Are you sleepy, Jaime?" she would ask.

"Very sleepy, Ursulita."

"And it is so warm. I told Pablo to set a tub in your room."

He would kiss her.

"I think I am sleepy too, Diego." She always used this Spanish version of his name at this hour. He watched her yawn, found it pretty.

She would come to him when his bath was finished and he lay on the bed. When she was by his side, sometimes she pretended to be asleep and waited for the kiss that was to wake her.

"You're a little fraud, Ursulita."

"Shall I be bold then?"

"You shall be—just my Ursulita."

Then she would cling to him hungrily, revel in his caresses, return them as warmly. That always surprised him a little—that she should want him so much.

He arranged a picnic for the first day in June and surprised her with it. He had found a mountain glen where a creek chattered over mossy rocks. After Juan had fallen asleep in the arms of his nurse they watched the day die redly across the rugged peaks.

"I wish these days could last forever, Jaime." She leaned against his shoulder.

"It's been fun, hasn't it? We've a little world of our own here, just the three of us. We need nothing more."

"There will be more, Diego."

"Let's not look at the future, the present is enough for me."

"But it isn't the future. Don't you understand what I'm trying to tell you?"

He kissed her fervently. "I hope it will be a girl and just like you."

"I want another boy. Only this time he must have blue eyes and hair the color of yours. Then I can watch him when you are away and remember how you look."

"I won't be away," he promised.

Don Juan arrived in August and he brought a letter from Maggie.

*Rezin planned to join you in Texas before now, but I must tell you what has happened. Your brother is going blind, Jim, and I don't know what to do. They tell us there's a doctor in Cincinnati who might help him but that seems a long way off. I wish you were here to help me because I don't know which way to turn.*

*Rezin feels all right otherwise but of course mighty low on account of his eyes. We were all ready to start for Texas when the trouble first came on, so I bought a little place here in Iberville Parish near Plaquemine for us to stay. It*

*is all right. We would be very comfortable if Rezin felt better. We have plenty of means, Jim. I'm not worried about money. It's just Rezin I'm thinking of.*

The letter was signed, *Your sister, Maggie.* Jim translated the letter for Ursula.

"Of course, Jaime. You must go," she agreed, but she kept clinging to him. They knew the separation would be long. It was finally decided that Ursula and little Juan should spend the autumn in Monclova, old seat of the Veramendis, with her father and mother. This ancient town lay north of Saltillo, between it and the Texas border.

Jim was gone even longer than he expected. The doctor in Cincinnati shook his head.

"I'm afraid I can't help you. The best eye men in the country are Parrish in New York and Valentine Mott in Philadelphia. Try them. That's your best bet."

"You think it's any use, Jim?" Rezin asked.

"Of course. You're going to be all right, Rez. Quit worrying."

Dr. Valentine Mott in Philadelphia helped Rezin. They were there more than a month. By that time more than half of Ursula's pregnancy had passed. Jim chafed at the delay but dared not let his brother guess it. It lacked three weeks of Christmas when Rezin himself wanted to go home. He had partially recovered the sight of one eye. "It's more than I expected and you'd be surprised how grateful you are for a little when you thought you didn't have anything," he remarked. "Let's go, Jim. I want to be with Maggie and the children for Christmas."

All the way back to Louisiana, Jim thought constantly of Ursula. He would be home in time for the baby's arrival after all. He was restless with eagerness, and stayed only one day at Plaquemine although Maggie urged him to wait until after Christmas. He bought two horses, the best in the neighborhood. He planned to ride fast.

It was about five hundred miles to San Antonio. San Felipe was the halfway point and he reached it in six days by changing horses frequently. Here he met a man of whom

he'd heard much for a year. "Don Samuel," everyone called Sam Houston. Jim liked him immediately.

"I've heard a lot about you, Colonel Bowie." Because of *Los Leoncitos* Jim was often given this military title. "A good deal of it's trash, I know, now that I've met you."

Jim reddened. "I've never been able to understand why they make up these stories. There's little truth in them. I've had a fight or two when it was forced on me, but I don't go around picking quarrels."

Houston laughed. "I understand that, but you don't run away from them either. If we're ever backed into a corner I hope you're on my side."

"From what I hear I'm not so sure of that." Bowie's reply was frank. "There are stories going around about you down here, Don Samuel. They say President Jackson sent you, that your aim is to annex Texas to the United States."

Houston shrugged. "Probably about as much truth to the stories about me as there is to the ones about you. Jackson is my friend, of course, but I agree with Stephen Austin that this is no time for quarrels. It's a time for levelheaded men to stand together for the good of Texas."

"I'm glad to hear you say it. That's what I think too."

Five days later Jim drew rein in front of the Veramendi Palace at San Antonio, a weary figure on a gaunted horse. He climbed from the saddle stiffly, didn't notice his old friends, Ramón Navarro and Juan Seguin, hurrying toward him. Ramón threw an arm about his shoulders, Juan shook his hand. Neither spoke. "It's good to see you both," Jim grinned. "What's wrong? Can't you say anything?"

"Then you haven't heard?"

"Heard what?"

"It was the cholera—very bad this year. There were many victims in Monclova."

Jim began to understand. "For God's sake, get on with what you're trying to say!"

"Don Juan, Doña Josepha, the whole Veramendi family are dead."

Bowie had to wet his lips. "And Ursula?"

"Ursula too, Jaime, and little Juan. None was spared."

# 18

## *Uncertainty*

URSULA and little Juan had died in September. It was January now. Juan Seguin and Ramón Navarro would not let Jim leave San Antonio alone. They were at his side through the long weary ride to Monclova. Often they tried to talk to him but he seemed too stunned to hear. Nor could they do anything, to check the sobs which wracked him after he had talked with Maria, Ursula's old nurse. That seemed more pitiful to these men who had followed him with *Los Leoncitos,* because he'd always been so self-reliant. They were three days with him in the Monclova house, saying little but always present, waiting.

When Jim rode to Saltillo they were still at his side. They were not in the city an hour before they had a caller.

"Send him away, I don't want to see him," said Bowie.

The visitor wouldn't listen to Seguin's explanations.

"Tell him it's Stephen Austin. I'm on my way home from Mexico City. It's important."

Bowie was impatient when Seguin conveyed this message. He spoke louder than he realized. "Just because he's Stephen Austin does he think he can intrude on me now?"

Austin heard. His thin face was dull red when Juan returned.

"Tell Bowie I'll never intrude on him again."

He returned to the tavern and was sitting at a table in the patio when the soldiers came. Friends had warned him that he was to be arrested. He scoffed at them, was only half convinced even after they persuaded him to go to Bowie for help. When they led him away under guard, he still wasn't greatly worried. He had nothing to fear; he'd committed no crime. He was angry only at Bowie, who had turned him from his door.

Jim spent only one sleepless night in the Saltillo house.

When he greeted his friends at breakfast his eyes were feverish.

"I'm going to close up this place," he said tersely. "We'll stay at the tavern." Juan and Ramón followed him without question. They took only their personal belongings. Jim waited until the last servant had left and then locked the door.

Juan and Ramón had never seen him drink too much before. Now he sat long at the table, called for more wine, as if he dreaded to leave their company and face the night alone. This troubled them.

"Don't you think we've had enough?" Ramón asked when he called for a third bottle. "This isn't like you, Jaime."

Bowie stared at his empty glass. "Nothing's like anything any more," he said. "What does it matter? Send for another bottle."

It was much the same when he reached San Antonio. He tried living in the house he'd remodeled for Ursula, but very soon he shut this door too and moved to the Veramendi Palace.

He remained shut up here, several times refused to see visitors who wanted him to play a part in the troubled Texas affairs.

Only his oldest friends were admitted.

"This man say his name is Señor William Travis," Juan Seguin explained. "He has journeyed all the way from San Felipe to see you, Jaime."

"Tell him I know what he wants. These politicians will ruin Texas yet. I'll have no part in it."

Travis went away angry. The Whartons came and left; Francis Johnson had no better luck.

"He's your natural leader," Don Samuel Houston told these chieftains of the Texas War Party. "Bowie is a leader all factions respect. He'd unite the state."

Travis was still offended. "He's nothing but a sot."

"One drunk Bowie is worth a dozen common men."

Houston came to San Antonio himself, but did not present himself at the Veramendi Palace until he'd made the ac-

quaintance of Juan Seguin. That night he took Houston with him.

"Why did you bring him here?" Bowie glared at Seguin.

Houston spoke swiftly. "I told you once if it ever came to trouble I hoped you'd be on my side, Colonel Bowie. But this is more important than just you or me. It concerns the welfare of Texas."

"I won't be dragged into these quarrels. I'm not interested."

Don Samuel sat down. "You think that now, my friend. Do you know my story?"

Jim didn't answer.

"I've not told it before to any living man but I think you would understand." He spoke simply, tracing with humility the career of the brilliant soldier, congressman, governor of Tennessee, who because of a woman turned his back on these achievements to go and live among the Indians. "They said Sam Houston was through then," he added. "But they didn't know me. Here I am."

"You've come here for something." Jim spoke slowly. "Tell me what it is."

"Maybe you can tell me what I want after I tell you how things stand. There's trouble ahead. Texas wants to be a state, of course. We held a meeting and drew up a constitution and Stephen Austin went to Mexico City to present it. They listened to him, gave us most of the reforms we asked but said we weren't ready for statehood yet. Then, on his way home, Austin was arrested. He's still in a Mexican jail. We don't know exactly why. Last, Santa Anna became president because he was a champion of the democratic constitution of 1824, but now he ignores it. All our rights are guaranteed by that constitution and he's thrown it out the window."

"That goes for every state in Mexico, not just Texas." Bowie had grown interested.

"That's why I had to see you. Texas is split into a War Party and the Peace Party, firebrands and conservatives. You're the man who can unite us. It isn't a matter of colonists against Mexicans, it's every Texian against despot-

ism. We want a leader who'll represent both factions."

Bowie shook his head slowly. "A year ago I might have tried. Now it isn't in me."

The Hodges plantation on the Guadalupe was a hospitable way station for travelers between San Antonio and the eastern colonies. William Travis stopped there on his way back from San Antonio. It was his first visit since he brought word of Aaron's death. "Oh, Mama, he's wonderful," said Camille after her first glimpse of him. "Did you ever see such beautiful clothes? He's handsome, too."

"Such notions for a child to have."

Camille tossed her blond head defiantly. "I'm fifteen. I bet he isn't so old, not more than twenty-four. Besides, I like men of experience."

Jacqueline admired him too. She said nothing, but Sybil noticed both girls were dressed in their best that evening.

"I hate to think of you ladies alone here," Travis said at dinner. "These are dangerous times, Mrs. Hodges."

"We aren't alone," Sybil assured him. "There are nearly a hundred and fifty people on the plantation, including two overseers."

"We've had no Indian trouble here in years," Jacqueline volunteered. "Jim Bowie and his *Leoncitos* see to that."

"I wasn't thinking of Indians but I doubt if Bowie would be much help any more if they did give trouble."

"Why not?"

He sensed the challenge behind her question. "Well, he isn't what he was. Why should the Indians be afraid of a drunkard?"

"I don't believe it." Jacqueline defended her hero stoutly.

Travis shrugged. "I'm sorry to disillusion you. Bowie has disappointed many people. Some men even thought he was our logical leader in the struggle against Mexico. I must admit I never agreed. He always saw the Mexican point of view, not ours. Don't forget he was married to a Veramendi."

"There were no finer people than the Veramendis." Sybil was surprised to find herself making this defense. "I've

been a guest in their home. Ursula Veramendi was a very lovely girl."

"Oh, well, if you like that type."

"What type, Mr. Travis? In a way she reminded me of Camille."

"A blonde?"

"The same type—blond hair, brown eyes. In New Orleans we called such a girl a *chatin.*"

Travis was equal to the occasion. He bowed gallantly. "In that case, madam, I can only say I admire Bowie's taste."

It startled Sybil that she had defended Jim so stoutly. She thought of it after Travis left. She thought of Bowie all week; it was a nagging worry that kept recurring.

She seldom accompanied the wagons that went to San Antonio for supplies. This time she made clothes an excuse. "You girls need some new dresses and I'm not going to trust some man for that. We'll go along and see what we can find."

The girls were exploring the town while their mother shopped. Bowie was walking home from the tavern with Juan Seguin when he saw them. Camille's blond head attracted his attention. "Who is that?" he demanded.

Juan knew why he asked. She reminded him of Ursula, too. "Their stepfather was the planter Hodges who was killed at Velasco. Remember? Their mother was married twice; they have a different name."

Bowie stopped. "They're sisters?"

Something in his tone arrested Seguin's attention. "I don't wonder you're surprised. They aren't at all alike."

Jim stared as they passed. One swift glance at Camille was enough. Now his scrutiny was fixed on her sister, noting the blue eyes and the red in the dark hair.

"Which one's the older?" he demanded.

Juan shrugged. "That I do not know, my friend."

# 19

## *A Question Is Answered*

TWO horsemen stopped before the Veramendi Palace that winter. One was lank, wiry-framed, a cruel seam scarring one side of his lean face. His young, blue-eyed companion towered half a head above him as they dismounted.

"Not home, eh? Wal, we'll jest wait." Jess Leeman was sure of his welcome.

Bowie found them in the patio when he returned. Jess was an old friend to be greeted warmly; he didn't recognize the other man.

"Don't know this young feller, eh?"

"I think I've seen you before somewhere." Jim eyed the youngster thoughtfully. "I've a feeling I should know you."

"Shucks, you larned him to throw a knife when he war jest a sprig, but I ain't s'prised yo're a mite fuddled. He war jest half-sized then."

"You look a lot like your mother." Jim held out his hand. "That's what had me puzzled. Your name's Kirk, isn't it?"

"Marsten Kirk, sir. I'd have known you anywhere, Mr. Bowie."

"None of that mister stuff, Mars. How are your father and mother?"

"Fine, sir. They sent you a letter." He produced it from his pocket.

Jim was remembering the gracious friends who once nursed him back to health as he read the message. *And since he's determined to go to Texas, we'll feel easy about it knowing he's under your capable eye.* The sentence seemed to stand out on the page bolder than the rest. My capable eye, he thought. Here's someone who hasn't heard that Jim Bowie is through, someone who still believes in him. He thrust the letter into his pocket.

"You didn't need that letter. Just being Mars Kirk is

recommendation enough. But I'm glad to hear from your people."

He thrust his hand into his pocket, felt the rumpled pages. He valued that message.

For more than a year there had been few guests in the old palace. Now Jim wanted them, not for himself but because of Mars. He didn't quite understand this himself. The boy expected so much of him. It would have angered him had he been accused of playing a role, yet in a sense that was what he was doing; he was acting the part of Jim Bowie as he once had been, because of a line he remembered from a letter. Old friends responded quickly. He was warmed by the welcome he found in their homes, the eagerness with which they came to his side.

Ursula's people, he had called them; now he felt they were his own.

"I want to join *Los Leoncitos,*" Mars said unexpectedly one day. "When trouble comes I want to fight under you."

"It's been a long time since there was any need for *Los Leoncitos,*" Jim answered slowly.

"They'll play their part when the time comes," was the confident answer. "That's where I want to be."

The crisis came unexpectedly and was not brought about by the Texas War Party as Bowie had feared, but by Santa Anna himself. The president dismissed the Mexican congress and made himself dictator. He demanded that all states reduce their militia to the ratio of one man to each five hundred inhabitants and ordered the state legislatures disbanded. Resentment was not confined to Texas; it spread throughout Mexico. Governor Viesca of Coahuila-Texas, disregarding threats, called out the militia and tried to move the state capital to San Antonio. He was captured en route, together with Colonel Ben Milam, Dr. John Cameron and several other state officers. When news of this reached San Antonio a meeting was called at the home of Erasmo Seguin. Ramón Musquiz, who had succeeded Veramendi as vice-governor but had been deposed by Santa Anna's arbitrary action, presided and the principal families were present. With Viesca in prison the state lacked an executive.

"I propose that we set up a state government here at once," said Bowie, "with Musquiz as governor. We should co-operate with the other states in defending our rights."

"I am willing, providing the whole state is united," Musquiz volunteered. "Find out how the colonists feel at San Felipe and Anahuac."

That day Bowie rode east. Mars and Jess were with him and twenty of his *Leoncitos.*

"Maybe this is what we needed to unite Texas," he told Juan Seguin.

He was disappointed at San Felipe; the War Party was in the saddle. Travis with fifty armed men had attacked Captain Tenorio and his little garrison of twenty soldiers at Anahuac, disarmed them and driven them from the town. Worse, the Travis faction was outspoken in its hatred of all Mexicans. They held a meeting in San Felipe where it was suggested that they march on San Antonio, capture the town and drive the Mexicans out. Bowie's little troop met hostility everywhere.

"This is idiocy," Jim told Travis. "We're on the verge of war and you'd divide Texas against itself."

"It is war," was the hot retort. "Choose your sides, Bowie. Are you with us or with the Mexicans?"

Houston proved a staunch ally. With his help Bowie stemmed the brash project against San Antonio.

There was bitterness in the ranks of *Los Leoncitos* as they rode homeward. News from the south continued bad. Santa Anna moved swiftly to suppress revolt. Most opposition faded in the face of his army, but in Zacatecas Governor Carlos Garcias led the state's forces against the dictator and was defeated at the battle of Guadalupe. Grim vengeance was exacted of the state as an example to rebels everywhere. After the butchery came pillage. Men heard its news whitefaced.

There still were calm men on both sides. Colonel Ugartechea had arrived in San Antonio with a garrison of five hundred men. He tried to avert the threatened storm with a tactful proclamation assuring all colonists that their rights would be respected, that troops were in Texas only to

prevent smuggling and as a protection against the Indians.

Bowie didn't sink back into his old lethargy. The emergency aroused him. He felt the need for action and took another trip through the Anglo-Texian settlements, this time riding alone, and visiting settlers in their cabins. He was away eight weeks and encouraged by the result.

"There's a reasonable middle ground somewhere," he told Sam Houston when they met in Brazoria. "Bloody Zacatecas and Santa Anna's other excesses drive us toward war on one side, Travis and his crowd on the other. I can't stomach Santa Anna but I have no more liking for the warmongers."

"Suppose Santa Anna marches an army into Texas. What would you do then, Bowie?"

"I'd fight, but when that happens I hope Texas will be united and we'll all be fighting on the same side."

"My idea exactly," Houston approved.

Stephen Austin arrived back in Texas after his long imprisonment in September. A great meeting was held in Brazoria to welcome him, and Bowie went. Jim was encouraged when Austin said in his speech, "Let all personalities, all divisions, or excitements, or passion or violence be banished from among us." He tried to see Austin after the meeting. "Let's go where we can speak in quiet," he suggested.

"I don't want to trouble you, Colonel Bowie."

Jim didn't understand. "Nothing's too much trouble now. We must all stand together."

"Where do you stand, Bowie? What are you, American, Texian or Mexican? I came to you once." Austin spoke with deliberation. "It was the night of my arrest in Saltillo. I needed help but you couldn't be disturbed. Why? Were you on the other side?"

Jim turned away. Austin made no effort to call him back.

Two events precipitated conflict. Ugartechea, while trying to pacify the colonists, made one mistake. He demanded the arrest of Lorenzo de Zavala, former governor of the state of Mexico, who had taken refuge in Texas, and of Travis and the ringleaders in the Anahuac affair. Texians had deplored that incident but had no intention of turning these men over to the authorities. The other was the arrival

of General Martin Perfecto de Cos with five hundred men at Matagorda to reinforce the troops at San Antonio. Ugartechea's demand had united the Texians, Cos's arrival inflamed them. There was talk of opposing his march northward. Attention was diverted from this by a sudden demand on the town of Gonzales to deliver a cannon placed there four years before for defense against the Indians. The alcalde there refused to turn it over and appealed to the neighboring towns for help. When Ugartechea heard this he sent Lieutenant Francisco Castañeda and a hundred men to seize the cannon.

Mexican troops held San Antonio firmly.

No word of this was allowed to leak out there, but Juan Seguin saw the soldiers leave and hurried to the Veramendi Palace.

"It is come, Jaime. Ugartechea has sent out troops. I believe there'll be fighting."

"Where are they going?"

Seguin shrugged. "*Quien sabe?* I only know I saw them march out, a hundred strong and well mounted."

Jim made his decision swiftly.

"Get word to *Los Leoncitos*. Tell them to meet me at the upper Salado ford, mounted and armed. We must warn the colonists."

Jess Leeman and Mars Kirk galloped with him when he rode to the rendezvous. There were thirty-one men in the company. Jim hurried off three messengers to sound the first alarm, one for Gonzales, another to Nacogdoches, the third to Sam Houston at San Felipe. Other scouts were sent out to locate the enemy column.

"Find 'em and hang on," he instructed Jess Leeman, who commanded this detail. "Get me word as soon as you can."

The Hodges plantation was near the upper crossing of the Guadalupe. He would advise Sybil she would be safer in San Felipe or one of the eastern towns until this struggle ended; but he stubbornly resolved he wouldn't see her himself.

He'd send a messenger to her with his warning.

"We're not far from the Hodges plantation, are we, Don

Jaime?" Mars had fallen into the San Antonio habit of addressing him.

"You've been there?" Bowie asked quickly.

"Jess and I stopped there on our way to San Antonio." The boy grinned. "And I've been back a few times since if you want."

"H'm, I've heard there were a couple of pretty girls in the house. What are you doing—robbing the cradle?"

"Oh, no, sir, just the right age if you ask me, Don Jaime. That is, the oldest one."

"Let's see—that's the blonde, isn't it?"

"No, sir. Jacqueline is the brunette. She's the oldest. She's eighteen."

Eighteen, thought Jim, and this was 1835. He figured swiftly and yet he already knew the answer. "We'll go together, Mars," he said, "to warn Mrs. Hodges."

# 20

## *The Battle of Concepción*

SYBIL met them at the door, welcomed Mars with a smile.

"You'll find Jacqueline in the arbor," she told the boy, then turned to Bowie.

"The trouble has come, Sybil." The harshness of his voice reflected the worry of his mind. "There's going to be war. Ugartechea has sent a column of troops east and I'm riding to rouse the colonies."

"I'll have a boy take your horses. You can spend the night here and ride on in the morning." Her voice was cool, impersonal as she extended the usual hospitality of the frontier.

"That won't be necessary. My company is encamped not two miles away across the river."

He planned it that way, she thought. He's very careful not to take any favors from me.

They were interrupted by Jacqueline's arrival. Jim heard her coming and turned to face the door. He saw a tall girl in a full, printed dress, whose blue eyes met his directly. She was flushed and smiling.

"I've always wanted to meet you, Colonel Bowie, and when Mars told me you were here——"

He was so engrossed in watching her he forgot to answer. Sybil broke the silence. "I'm afraid my daughter is a hero-worshiper, Colonel Bowie. Remember she's grown up here where every traveler had some new legend to tell about you."

He'd taken no pleasure from the tales he had heard. "I'm sorry," he said. "There's little truth in those stories. They make me sound pretty bad, I'm afraid."

"But they didn't," Jacqueline protested. "How could we have lived on the frontier if it hadn't been for you and *Los*

*Leoncitos?* And your San Saba battle—why, I reckon that was the greatest Indian fight there ever was."

"I was thinking of all the stories about my knife fights. I don't recognize most of them myself." He wanted very much to be justified in the eyes of this girl. "I've never fought unless I had to," he added earnestly.

"But the sand-bar duel was real!"

"Ye-es, there's truth in that. But even there it wasn't a fight of my choosing."

Jacqueline wouldn't be stopped. "You were shot and stabbed and clubbed by your enemies; you were armed only with a knife. Yet you won through. You never give up, that's why you've become a—a symbol to us here, Colonel Bowie. That's why we aren't afraid of Santa Anna now. Why, Mother told me——"

"That's enough, Jacqueline," Sybil interrupted. "You're embarrassing our visitor."

Jim felt a warm glow of gratitude toward Sybil then. She must have hated me, he thought. But she didn't take it out on the child. This would have been an easy thing for her to destroy and yet she's let Jacqueline grow up with a good picture of me.

"This is an exposed position, Mrs. Hodges. You'll have to leave here." Jim remembered the purpose of his visit. "You'll be safe enough in the eastern colonies, San Felipe or Anahuac."

"Quit my plantation? What would happen then?"

"It depends on where we're able to stop Santa Anna. If I have my way we'll fight southwest of San Antonio, cut him off from a base here, then nothing will happen."

"You don't sound too sure."

"I'm not. So much depends on whether Texas is united, and on our leaders. Ugartechea already has a strong garrison. We hear Cos is coming with five hundred men and that Santa Anna is following with five thousand. If they get a foothold here, no telling what will happen."

Sybil stared about her at the plenty and comfort of this place. She'd helped direct its growth. "I won't leave my plantation."

"Remember Bloody Zacatecas. Santa Anna is drunk with power. He looted the whole state."

Her chin set defiantly. "I won't run away," she persisted.

"You're being very foolish."

"If the men don't run the women won't have to," she retorted.

He thought he understood. "You haven't changed," he said grimly.

They crossed the river next morning, stopped to warn two more families. There were only women at the second house. "We got word they needed help from Gonzales yesterday. My man hurried off right away," they were told.

When they reached the town they learned a skirmish already had been fought.

"It was our Lexington," John Moore told Bowie. "Started just like the American Revolution. I had one hundred and sixty-eight men and when we heard the enemy was coming we brought all the boats over to our side of the river so they couldn't cross. They went into camp about six miles away so we crossed the river last night and took our cannon with us. There was a heavy fog and we were able to get right on top of 'em before they saw us. After we opened up on 'em, Castañeda asked for a truce. He said he'd go on back if we'd just turn over the cannon and I sent back word demanding his surrender. Neither one of us would budge and when I decided he was just wasting time, hoping for reinforcements, I loaded up the six-pounder with grape and let 'em have it. Then we charged and they ran. 'Twasn't much of a show as fights go but we sent 'em running home. That's the important thing."

Bowie rode on to San Felipe. Sam Houston was the first man he met there.

"Have you seen Austin's proclamation? He's declared war against military despotism. We're going to take San Antonio and we won't stop until every Mexican soldier is driven out of Texas."

"Good." Bowie liked the plan. "San Antonio is the key to Texas. Without it for a base, Santa Anna is helpless."

Austin had been universal choice to command the army

and had taken steps to form a permanent government to sit at San Felipe. The army was gathering at Gonzales but before leading his company back there, Jim tried to see Austin again.

"I'm a busy man," the new commander told Houston. "I haven't time to see every volunteer who comes in."

"But Colonel Bowie is the best-known fighter in Texas."

"I have little confidence in Colonel Bowie. If he's willing to fight for Texas, good. We need every man. Let him report to Gonzales like everyone else. I'll not see him."

"Austin's busy," Houston told Jim. "He'll meet you at Gonzales."

News of another small victory reached them before they left town. George Collingworth with less than fifty men had captured Goliad in a surprise attack. Better still was the news that Colonel Ben Milam, captured with Governor Viesca, had escaped and joined the force there. Goliad was the new town that had sprung up near the site of ruined La Bahia.

There were three hundred and fifty Texians in the little army which Austin led west on October thirteenth. Bowie's company had grown to fifty men. It could have been larger —but Austin wanted to fill up other companies and assigned volunteers as they arrived. Houston wasn't to accompany the army. He had been made commander of volunteers in east Texas.

Bowie had not had his interview with Austin. The day they moved out he tried again. "This is my country, General. If you'll let me lead the way, we won't walk into any traps."

Austin wanted to be fair. He wasn't sure of this man but he knew his fighting reputation. "All right, Colonel. Have it your way."

The army reached Salado Creek eight miles below San Antonio without serious opposition. Cos meanwhile had reached San Antonio with large reinforcements. There were more than twelve hundred troops in town. Juan Seguin and Blaz Herrera, another veteran of *Los Leoncitos,* slipped in after dark, talked with friends and came back with a full

report. When Austin heard this he decided to wait for more volunteers, but he wanted to find a more favorable position for his camp and sent for Bowie. He was a just man.

"I'm not an experienced soldier, Colonel, but I know enough to recognize a good job when I see it. Now I want someone to scout out the missions south of Bexar before we advance farther. I think you're the man to do it."

For the expedition, he reinforced *Los Leoncitos* with Fannin's company.

Jim didn't like Fannin. He thought of him as "one of the Travis crowd."

The total force numbered ninety-two men. Bowie decided to lead the advance personally and placed Andy Briscoe in command of his own company. With him he took Juan Seguin, Jess Leeman, Mars Kirk and Ramón Navarro and advanced cautiously ahead. Mission La Purisima Concepción was only a mile and a half south of the town, close by the river. "A fine camp, easily defended, and from here we're in good position to intercept reinforcements or communications from the south," he decided. As the two companies came up he fanned them out in a wide skirmish line to reconnoiter as far as San Antonio on both sides of the river.

It was dark before his reports were in. "We'll stay here for the night," he said.

He selected his camp with an eye to defense, where a bend in the river provided a natural fortification around two sides of a triangle. In addition a low bluff, eight or ten feet tall, skirted the bank, a place of easy defense in case of attack. His own company under Briscoe was encamped along the north side of the triangle, Fannin's along the south arm. Pickets were thrown out in the plain beyond and Richard Andrews was stationed in the mission tower from which he had a good view of the surrounding country. "We've been right up in sight of the city walls. They're bound to know we're out here," Bowie commented.

Day broke with a heavy fog. Henry Karnes had just been relieved by Juan Seguin on outpost duty and was walking toward the river when a Mexican cavalry patrol almost ran

him down. The mist had screened them. Karnes fired his rifle at the nearest rider and started running. The Mexicans, unable to see that they were opposed by only one man, fell back too. There was a quick volley from the other pickets to add to their confusion. Little could be seen. Bowie promptly threw out a line of skirmishers under Jess Leeman.

These were driven slowly in.

"Thar's plenty of 'em," Jess reported. "An' they've got us pinned down agin the river. Thar's no way out 'ceptin' to swim."

"We dont need a way out, Jess. If they'll just attack we'll whip 'em. I wouldn't want a better position. They have to advance into a cross fire. Take your skirmishers out again before the fog lifts and cut down every clump of brush that might obstruct our aim. Do it quick. We'll be ready for 'em when the time comes."

By eight o'clock the sun broke through. Bowie could see the enemy then and estimated their force at four hundred, most of them infantry, but with five squadrons of cavalry as a reserve and with one brass cannon in their center. The enemy advanced slowly, maintaining a steady fire; the Texians waited in quiet. Seeing their range was ineffective, the Mexican commander ran his cannon up to within eighty yards of the south bank. Fannin met them with a hot fire. On the other flank Bowie's company raked them. They broke and retreated. Their officers whipped them back into line. Again the ranks thinned as the Texian fire bit into them.

The assault faltered once more and fell back. After the third assault they were in full flight. Their cannon was abandoned in the field.

They found a hundred and two Mexicans on the field, sixty-seven dead, the others wounded. Bowie first thought he hadn't lost a man.

Later he discovered the body of Richard Andrews, the sentry in the mission tower.

Fannin was generous. "You were right about our position, Colonel."

"And you knew how to fight it," Bowie replied warmly. "Your fire was a sight to see."

Austin arrived an hour later. The Texian army now numbered a thousand men. Like all volunteers, they wanted action and there was an immediate clamor to charge San Antonio. Austin hesitated. He turned to Milam. "What do you think, Colonel?"

"Bowie knows the place better than anyone else. Ask him," Milam suggested.

"I'd say no," said Jim. "We won here because we had the best position. In San Antonio Cos is fighting behind stone walls. You're handing him the advantage and he'll know how to use it. It would be foolhardy."

Austin still was anxious to go on, but none of his aides would agree.

He finally gave in grudgingly, saying, "You've had more experience at this fighting than I have."

# 21

## *Storming San Antonio*

AUSTIN was beset by many problems. These frontier volunteers wanted action, and for nearly a month they remained in camp while siege was laid to San Antonio. There was much grumbling and there were many desertions. Within three weeks the army had dwindled from a thousand to six hundred men. In the entire army Bowie's was the only company to show an increase, and this was due to the many Mexicans who slipped out of the town to join him. He had started with thirty-two men, all veterans of *Los Leoncitos* except Jess Leeman and Mars Kirk. At Gonzales nineteen others joined him, hard-bitten Indian fighters such as Cephas Hamm who had been with him at the Battle of San Saba. Thirty more San Antonians enrolled in his company here. Austin moved his camp to the old mill north of town but left Bowie and Fannin at Concepción.

"Have we so many men we can afford to divide the army?" Jim asked.

"Probably not," was the frank reply. Then because his faith in Bowie was mounting, he explained. "The mill is the closest good position but if this route isn't guarded they can bring men and provisions into town at will. You've proved you can take care of yourself. I trust you to hold it."

There was another reason. "They're mostly Mexicans in that company," Austin told Burleson. "We've a lot of men like Travis who hate them all and, only naturally, Bowie's men resent it. It's a good idea to keep them apart."

Burleson was blunt. "If every company was as good as that one we'd have nothing to worry about."

"Well, I'm leaving Fannin here to support him. Bowie's proved his mettle. Concepción will be well held."

Bowie still was worried by the division of the troops, too. With the enemy in superior force between him and Austin,

he considered the situation dangerous. Fannin joined him in continued protests without result. Finally, he decided his recommendations were ignored because Austin lacked confidence in him and offered to resign his command. That same day, and before receiving Bowie's letter, Austin finally took action and ordered the army united. In addition, as a mark of further confidence, he named Bowie temporary inspector general of the army, in the absence of the officer holding that rank.

Travis was not happy under Austin. The commander remembered his previous rashness too well and gave him no responsibility. So when he learned that the General Consultation was convening the first week in November he left the army, and rode to San Felipe. He arrived the day Henry Smith was elected governor of the new state. Smith was a member of his own War Party. It encouraged him to believe in his own prospects. When a resolution was presented for a declaration of independence, however, he was disappointed. The Peace Party mustered enough votes to defeat it. Instead, they declared themselves a state, loyal to Mexico, fighting for the rights guaranteed them under the constitution of 1824. Nevertheless, an ordinance was passed creating a regular army of eleven hundred and twenty men with Sam Houston as commander in chief with the rank of major general. Fannin was named colonel of artillery. Bowie, Milam, Burleson and other men already active in the army were ignored.

The recognition was not on the scale Travis wished. He had many friends and he busied himself with them that night. The next day he recommended that a battalion of cavalry be organized. Authorization for this was passed by the council and this time Travis was not disappointed. He was elected lieutenant colonel in charge of the cavalry.

"What are they doing? Sending politicians to lead us?" Burleson asked Bowie when he heard of it. "A twenty-six-year-old boy with no experience, and they give him an independent command. It doesn't make sense."

Bowie didn't like it either. "Maybe it's because I never could get along with him," he admitted.

At San Antonio Cos remained safely behind his walls, waiting for Ugartechea to bring up new troops. Austin was impatient to attack but lacked resources. He had only five cannon, including the brass six-pounder Bowie had captured at Concepción, and ammunition was short for these. Then in mid-November, unexpected reinforcements arrived. Houston's recruiting had borne fruit. There was a company from east Texas under Captain English, eighty Mississippians under Captain Peacock and two companies of New Orleans Grays, one hundred and seventy strong, under Captains Morris and Breece. This brought his force up to eight hundred men and Austin decided to storm the city on November twentieth, gave orders for the attack the following day. "The quicker the better," he added, "before any more men desert."

The officers held a conference that evening and Colonels Burleson and Sublett informed the commander that they were unwilling to make the attempt, unsupported by adequate artillery against a walled position. Austin countermanded his order. Two days later a messenger brought word that he had been appointed commissioner to the United States and was to leave at once. Before departing Austin reviewed his little army, explained the reason for his going and appealed to the men to remain. In closing he called for volunteers. Four hundred and five stepped out; the rest refused to stay. Burleson was elected commander in chief. Bowie was absent on a scout and had no part in these decisions.

Sam Houston received an erroneous report of this election. He heard Bowie had succeeded Austin in command and was pleased. *It's a wise decision,* he wrote. *There is no man on whose forecast, prudence and valor I place a higher estimate.*

Three days later Jim was scouting southwest of town with a patrol of forty men. With him was "Deaf" Smith, famous frontier scout and long-time friend. Seguin had brought word that Cos was expecting a shipment of silver to pay his garrison. Bowie's little force was spread out to

cover a wide area. They were near the upper ford of the Medina River when Smith came galloping up.

" 'Bout two hundred men beyant the ford headin' fer town," the scout reported. "I think it's Cos's silver 'cause they're herdin' a hundred well-loaded mules."

"Ride hard for camp. Go straight to Burleson. Tell him to send help. I'll hold 'em off as long as I can." Jim gathered his little force and fell back slowly toward the town, careful to remain out of sight while he sought a favorable spot for battle. He found a place to his liking, only a mile and a half west of town, where he could shelter his men in a shallow ravine.

There he halted. When the approaching column was in point-blank range he opened fire.

When Smith reached camp, Burleson immediately started to Bowie's support. Cos observed this action from the town and rightly guessed its purpose. Almost immediately a relief column, four hundred strong, sallied out of the presidio to the rescue. The Texians had a head start but they also had farther to go. For a few minutes it developed into a race to see which side would arrive at the scene first. About sixty of the Texians were mounted and outdistanced the others. As they came up they took cover in a ditch similar to Bowie's, a short distance away and at right angles to it. The Mexican column came up next. The Texians were badly outnumbered and facing an enemy on both sides, but they had the advantage of good cover. Firing was brisk and the enemy followed Bowie's example, taking possession of a third gully.

Captain Jim Swisher led the main Texas force which arrived last. Swisher attacked and Bowie supported him, sweeping in to the head of the ravine where the enemy cannon were placed. When this position was captured the enemy fell back toward the town. It developed into a running fight which lasted about half an hour. The Mexicans reached the walls safely but their pack train fell into Bowie's hands.

Jess Leeman discovered its burden. "Shucks, this ain't silver, Jim. This hyar's hay."

The day after the Grass Fight Jim received a letter from Houston.

*Things are going from bad to worse,* he wrote. *Governor Smith is a good man, he tries to back me up, but he and the council can't get along. I don't know where it's going to lead. Unless there's an immediate prospect of a battle there, can't you join me here at once? Together, I think perhaps we can work out some practical plans.*

Jim reported to Burleson at the old mill. Then he rode alone for San Felipe. He left his company under the command of Andy Briscoe.

Mars Kirk had not been inside the town since the siege began although some of *Los Leoncitos* had gone in after information. He asked to accompany them once but Jim shook his head. "Too risky for you, Mars."

"But Juan Seguin's been in often. So have Ramón Navarro and some of the others."

"Certainly. It's their home town. They could find their way around blindfolded and if seen they have a chance to pass as citizens. You couldn't."

Several days after Bowie left Mars repeated his request to Juan Seguin.

"Ramón and I are going tonight. We'll take you along," Juan promised.

Their preparations were simple: they smeared mud on face and hands, left their rifles behind, and each carried a pistol and a knife.

Because San Antonio was a collection of villages grown together, crisscrossed by streams and canals, it was almost impossible to close its many entrances, despite the fortifications. Most of the town lay between the San Antonio River and San Pedro Creek which ran parallel, north and south, about four hundred yards apart. Here was the old walled town of San Antonio de Bexar, and adjoining it was San Fernando de Bexar. The river interrupted its north and south course at this point to make a wide detour eastward for several hundred yards and the expanding town had crowded this neck of land. Still farther east, across the

stream, the old mission San Antonio de Valero, commonly called the Alamo, formed another settlement, defended by strong stone walls, while south of the river's U was the village of LaVillita. In addition to the two main watercourses, a number of *acequias* or open canals watered the town, and it was along one of these that they made their way. Enemy outposts were numerous and vigilant, but this was home to Mars's companions; they hugged the stream's shadows, whispered as silently along as the flowing water. Once they were past the pickets, boldness was the safest course.

"Single file now and about ten yards apart," Juan instructed. "Just keep your eyes on me and walk casually. If we're seen, they must think we belong here."

They followed the main *acequia* to the Navarro house which stood about a hundred yards north of the cathedral. Juan stepped in first, followed quickly by the others. Ramón's gray-bearded father welcomed them; his mother and sister had food waiting.

"There are twenty-one cannon balls gathered at the home of Pedro Vallejo," Ramón's sister Inez told them. "It will take a company to carry them all. They were gathered last night." This was another source of Texian supply; the citizens gathered the spent balls and hid them until friends could carry them through the lines to feed Burleson's cannon.

"Cos has moved three prisoners to the Garza house," Ramón's father said. "Doña Elena tells me there is only one guard at night. They can be freed."

Seguin nodded and smiled. "They can help us carry back some of that scrap iron."

The Garza house stood not far north of the Navarro's. Apprised of the plan by Ramón's father, the Garzas opened the patio gate for them and the trio slipped silently through, reached the prisoners' door undetected. Their number and their blackened faces warned the guard. He tried to reach Ramón with his bayonet; Juan lunged forward to knock it aside. A knife silenced the soldier before he could cry a warning.

The prisoners were Holmes, Smith and Maverick, held

because of suspected Texas sympathies. On the return journey they chose a different path to pick up the cannon balls at Vallejo's house. They carried two apiece, and escaped without incident.

Colonel Milam was at the battery, talking with a scout named Arnold when they brought the cannon balls in.

"So you've been in town again." He noted their burden. "Have any trouble?"

"No, Colonel, and we freed some prisoners while we were there."

"Arnold's just back from two days in the town, too." Milam jerked a thumb at his companion. "If you men can get in and out, why can't I?"

"I'll take you any time you want to go, Colonel," Seguin volunteered.

"You're going to get your chance, my friend. Come along with me, all of you."

They followed him to Colonel Francis Johnson's camp. The colonel was grouped with half a dozen others around a fire, asleep.

Milam woke him.

"I'm going to take San Antonio, Frank."

Johnson sat up quickly. "They say it would be madness for us to storm stone walls."

"Don't have to storm walls."

"How do you plan to get in?"

Milam indicated the men beside him. "These fellows just came out. What they can do I can do. We'll take 'em by surprise."

Johnson climbed out of his blanket. "I'll go with you. Let's wake up Burleson and see what he says." He shook the man beside him. "Wake up, Tom. Wake everybody up. Get moving, man; there's fightin' to do."

The entire camp was astir by the time they'd finished their interview with Burleson. "It's risky," he said, "but I can't help liking the idea. What makes you so sure you can do it, Ben?"

Milam stared at the little battery of Texas artillery. "We've been gettin' a sight of cannon balls out of that place

without stormin' any walls. Give me the men and I'll make it."

Burleson agreed but refused to commit all his men to the assault. "I'll give you a diversion to distract their attention," he said. "And we must keep a strong reserve in case you run into trouble." His plans matured swiftly.

Milam was authorized to call for volunteers for his attacking party. He outlined his plan bluntly. "Who will go into San Antonio with old Ben Milam?" he concluded.

There were three hundred volunteers and these were divided into two columns, one under Milam, the other under Johnson. Two of the guns were to go with Milam, a twelve-pounder and a six-pounder. Neill took the other three guns and sixty men, crossed the river and marched east promptly. His task was to be a feint against the Alamo.

Mars Kirk, Jess Leeman and most of Bowie's company were in the assault party led by Johnson. It was still pitch-dark when they moved forward. "Deaf" Smith and Ramón Navarro were the scouts leading Milam's column; Arnold, John Smith and Juan Seguin guided Johnson's. Mars stuck close to Juan. The columns separated a few hundred yards north of the town, Milam taking a more westerly path in. Johnson was to advance along Soledad Street. Once inside the fortifications, Milam hoped to take the old walled presidio while Johnson's attack would be directed at the Plaza de las Yslas. These were the centers of resistance west of the river. They were at the fringe of the town when they heard Neill's guns begin their barking to the east.

"Neill might as well have a popgun for all the good he can do over there," Seguin whispered to Mars. "But if he keeps Cos busy for only an hour he'll have done his job well."

Having the shortest distance to go, their column penetrated the town first. Mars recognized the Garza house on the right. Only a short distance beyond and on the left was the Veramendi Palace. He squeezed Seguin's arm and pointed. A sentry was crossing the street. They flattened against a building and then edged forward, hoping to surprise him. Some movement behind them attracted his at-

tention. They were still fifty yards away when he fired. John Smith's bullet answered almost instantly and the soldier sprawled crazily in the street. Seguin darted forward, Mars at his heels. Behind them they could hear the pound of other running feet. Two sleepy soldiers met them at the palace door. Juan grappled with the first, Mars took care of the second with his pistol, then turned to help his friend. It wasn't necessary. The sentry was already dead.

Johnson ordered the palace fortified. Crowbars were used to chip loopholes in the thick walls. Windows and doors were reinforced with sandbags. This was a two-story building and Johnson hoped to take advantage of its height by placing marksmen on the flat roof. Typically there was a parapet around the roof, as on most Spanish houses, but this one proved too low for shelter and four men who clambered up were victims of the lead which swept the place. One was killed outright, the others seriously wounded. Their companions below saw their plight and tried to rescue them. The enemy was alert for this opportunity; marksmen picked off six men trying to climb the ladder to help their friends.

"We're jest furnishin' 'em targets this way," Jess Leeman observed, picking up an ax. "Grab a crowbar, Mars, an' come along. I'll show ye how to git 'em down." Together they chipped a hole in the roof from below and rescued the wounded.

Intense fire was maintained throughout the day without any change in position. As soon as night fell Johnson called for volunteers.

"I want those wooden houses just south of us burned. They're obstructing our aim." Jess Leeman, Seguin and Mars offered for this party. The fire in the street was too intense to risk a sortie there. A window in the south wall was unbarred; they slipped out that way and reached the dark houses unnoticed; it was their retreat after the flames had started that proved hazardous. Enemy bullets splattered about them before they reached the waiting window. The man beside Mars fell. He stopped to help him.

"Better take care of yourself, friend. By Jorry, this is go-

ing to be a hot place in another minute," the wounded man advised.

Mars slipped an arm under his shoulder. "We'll make it. Can you walk if I support you?"

"I'll try."

It was beyond his strength, though, and Kirk had to carry him. Jess helped hand the burden through the window.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"He's one of the New Orleans Grays. I don't know his name but I've seen him often enough. He's the one-eyed man."

Other volunteers were trying to dig a trench across the street to connect the Veramendi Palace and the de la Garza house, which was held by Milam. By dawn the trench was in use, its face reinforced with sandbags. Cos had not been idle during the night either. He had placed sharpshooters on the roofs of the surrounding buildings and their fire was intense. The Texians returned it from every loophole. By noon the trench had to be abandoned. The enemy had occupied a house which commanded it. Johnson decided that position must be taken and Mars was one of the sharpshooters who covered the attack. Covered by a heavy fire, Henry Karnes dashed across the street with a crowbar. When the door splintered under his attack, York's company stormed and took the house after fifteen minutes of desperate room-to-roo fighting.

Patrols were busy carrying water up from the river that night. Mars was on this detail when he met the man he'd rescued the previous night. His name was Henri Bertin. He had two wounds, a bullet through his shoulder and another through his thigh.

"I'd be out there yet if it hadn't been for you," he said. "Who was it told us this was going to be easy? By Jorry, these Mexicans can fight."

"I never expected anything else. I'm in Bowie's company, the old *Leoncitos*. Most of them are Mexicans and there are no better fighters in Texas. I'm proud to be with them."

"Bowie. I hear a lot of him. Where is he?" The scar of

the wounded man's sightless eye twitched when he raised his brow. "I think we need him here right now."

"He'd know what to do," Mars agreed.

The fire seemed to increase on both sides during the night. Cos had thrown up entrenchments east of the river, back of the Veramendi Palace, and had mounted some artillery there, protected by sharpshooters. At dawn this position opened up an enfilading fire. Directly to the south another gun emplacement had been built in a stone building on the east side of the plaza, and a bombardment was opened from here, too. The cross fire was damaging. Johnson placed Jess Leeman at the head of twenty marksmen to check the fire from the east. These were Bowie men. By noon they had silenced the enemy on their flank. The gun on the south was a more difficult problem. The six-pounder was borrowed from the trench, mounted on the second floor for better use and employed against this position, but without much success. These two guns dueled all day.

Johnson sent Mars across the trench to Milam with a message in the afternoon.

He could hold his position but saw little chance to advance. He wanted instructions.

"I'm going to carry the Plaza de las Yslas and cut 'em in two," said Milam. "Once they're split up we'll starve 'em out if necessary." He pointed across at the Navarro house to the west. "That's the first step. When I get that building we'll turn south."

Ramón Navarro, who had guided him in, was still with him. "I know the place, Colonel. It's my home. Let me lead the attack," he begged.

Milam clapped him on the shoulder. "I've given McDonald half of Crane's company for the job. You go show 'em the way. And good luck."

Mars Kirk went with his friend. The charge was under cover of a heavy rifle fire. Doors were battered in with crowbars and axes; the position was quickly won.

Late in the afternoon Milam decided on a conference with Johnson before opening his final attack. He started across the trench. A rifle bullet in the forehead killed him

before he reached the palace. He was buried in the patio there.

"Now what?" Johnson said, looking at the grave of the fallen leader.

"I know what he planned, Colonel." Mars had been at Milam's heels when he was shot. "He explained it when he attacked the Navarro house. He said he intended to swing south, take the plaza and cut the enemy forces in two."

Johnson looked at the officers around him. "It's the best idea yet. If we use this palace as a pivot, extend our position west and then swing south we can do it."

"When?" someone asked.

"Tonight. No use waiting."

Adjoining the Navarro home was Zambrano Row, a long, L-shaped stone house. Cos had taken it over and fortified it. Most of Milam's division was engaged in the attack at nine-thirty that night. Their hope for surprise failed. The alert enemy had garrisoned the building heavily and opened fire at once. The Texians battered at the walls with crowbar and ax from the Navarro house. "Deaf" Smith, who led the assault, was seriously wounded. Heavy casualties were suffered when the enemy garrison occupied the Navarro roof, loopholed the ceiling and fired down on the men below. The trapped Texians used the same loopholes to return the fire. Captain Crane finally leaped on a table and chopped a hole in the ceiling with an ax. A dozen men fell, the captain among them, trying to force a passage there before the enemy was driven back. The Texians swept across the roofs then and attacked the row from that vantage point. The defense was gallant; the Mexican troops fought with no thought of surrender. When the building finally was won at midnight Johnson himself was the only remaining officer above the rank of captain, and the casualties among the men had been equally heavy.

From here the Texians could fire on both the presidio and the plaza, however, and there remained only two stone buildings north of the plaza in enemy hands. For this assault the New Orleans Grays were brought over from the Veramendi Palace. They attacked at dawn. Again it was a

slow struggle, this time complicated by a counterattack, directed by Cos from the west. Captain Peacock of the Mississippi company was mortally wounded repelling it. The struggle lasted all through the fourth day.

Juan Seguin noticed Cos's flag that afternoon and called attention to it. He was flying the plain black "No Quarter" flag from both the presidio and the Alamo. The only Mexican flag was flown by the Texians from the Veramendi Palace.

During this day, too, Ugartechea arrived with the long-expected reinforcements of six hundred men. Ugartechea himself was recognized leading the counterattack on Zambrano Row later.

"Maybe the men who said we couldn't take this place without artillery knew what they were talkin' about," Cephas Hamm told Jess. "We've been fightin' four days and still haven't taken any of their strong points and Cos is gettin' reinforcements."

Jess reprimed his rifle. "Shucks, we've jest started to fight."

General Martin Cos was not greatly perturbed. He had lost stout positions in the four days of deadly fighting; yet his main strong points were intact, he had reinforcements and he was confident his overwhelming artillery superiority would stop the Texians. His losses had been severe but his assailants had paid dearly for every gain. He could better afford these casualties. Up to now the fighting had been confined to a nest of stone buildings which formed a pocket north of the plaza. He had lost these, but to advance farther the Texians had to cross exposed ground.

"I'll make a death trap of the Texas position," he confided to Ugartechea. "At dawn we will storm Burleson's position in overwhelming force. The operation will function like a giant sickle with the Alamo as its base. We will sweep from east to west. Any remnants of Burleson's force which escape must fall back into the town." He swung his arm in a wide arc to illustrate the movement. "We slam the door shut on them from their rear. They will be trapped, no

chance to advance, no hope for retreat. Then it's just a matter of starving them out. It won't take long."

Cos intended using most of his strength to accomplish his maneuver. Except for a skeleton force in the south, mostly artillery, his entire army was to be engaged. To mask the withdrawal of men from the Texian front, he opened a furious artillery bombardment from his positions on the plaza at midnight. The rumble of guns drowned out the sound of marching men. They were headed for the Alamo, launching point for the dawn assault. The movement was conducted so skillfully and with such quiet that even the men in the ranks were unaware of what was going on around them. The Texian lines were silent under the pounding of the cannonade. Cos had nearly half of his force already in the Alamo. The single bridge spanning the river was choked with other troops.

Suddenly from the distant plaza came a shout of "Treason!" At first Cos didn't understand the meaning of the cry, but as it was picked up and tossed along by hundreds of added throats the babble swelled.

The instant he distinguished the words he realized the danger.

"That must be stopped," he told Ugartechea. "It has the sound of panic."

With the other officer at his side he hurried to the scene, and tried to calm the men, keep them moving in their ordered ranks. The bridge was a funnel. He couldn't press his horse through the throng that jammed it, so forced his animal into the stream and swam it across. The pandemonium was spreading rapidly. As the delirium reached them men fought to escape. Those on the east bank sought safety on the west. On the bridge they collided with another surge of frenzied men headed in the opposite direction. Whole companies started to run. Cos tried to calm them. He shouted until he was hoarse. At first he was easily recognized, towering above the sea of bewildered men as he spurred his horse through. Then the animal was infected with the panic, started lunging in unmanageable circles. He had to dismount. From that moment he lost his identity, became just

a disheveled figure, buffeted by the crowd, his voice lost in its roar.

Two companies of conscript troops had tried to desert during the night, not to the Texians but homeward. A young officer discovered them and incautiously shouted, "Treason!" That started it. The cry had been picked up. The very deftness with which Cos had withdrawn his troops from the town added to the panic. When his men discovered abandoned positions they misunderstood. They thought the troops here had deserted.

In the beginning the bombardment silenced the Texians' rifles. There was little they could do but huddle in their positions and wait sullenly until the storm should pass. The spreading panic was unintelligible from these lines. They heard it start. As its roar swelled, cannon after cannon stopped its thunder. Briefly Johnson thought the tumult preceded an assault. He readied his men to repel it. Still nothing happened.

Then from the frenzied hubbub he picked up the cries of "Treason!" and guessed what had happened.

"We're going after 'em," he announced. "Charge the plaza first, clear it and hold the corner bastions. After that—" he peered at the forbidding walls of San Antonio de Bexar—"we'll storm the presidio itself."

By dawn the Texians held the entire central section of the city.

That morning Cos was compelled to surrender. He had no alternative.

# 22

## *Confusion*

BOWIE and Houston were together at San Felipe when they heard the news of Cos's surrender. Both were jubilant. "It means the war, Jim," the general said.

"It's a good start," Bowie conceded. "I don't expect Santa Anna to give up so easily, though."

"Oh, he'll be back, with a real army next time."

"As long as we hold San Antonio he lacks a base." Jim outlined his idea of the campaign. "It's a march of one hundred and fifty miles over semiarid country from the Rio Grande. That's the place to meet him, when his lines are extended."

Houston agreed. "With two thousand men we can throw back anything he sends against us."

Together they went to Governor Smith with their plan. Before the war Bowie had opposed him because of his activity in the War Party. "Well, damn my eyes, who's this with you, Sam? Don't tell me that old war horse has come round to our way of thinkin'."

"When there's fighting to do we're all in one camp, Governor," Houston replied. "And this is one man I want at my shoulder. I guess you've heard of Concepción and the Grass Fight. Those victories were no surprise to me. Colonel Bowie has a habit of winning his battles."

The governor peered at Jim through squinted eyes. "Maybe you'll admit you were wrong now. War was inevitable. I'm surprised a man as smart as you ever opposed it." He turned back to Houston. "Well, what do you want of me now, Sam?"

The general explained. "A strong army well equipped, stationed in San Antonio for duty between there and the border when Santa Anna advances. Give me that and I'll fight the war there."

"And win it there, too," Bowie added.

The governor glared at them. "D'you think that pack of blatherskites that thinks it's a congress could possibly be as sensible as that? Mark my words, they'll tie my hands."

"What's the matter with the Consultation?" Bowie asked after they left.

"Mainly, they're conservatives and Smith's a radical. He's a good man, but it's hard for him to get along with people. Let him alone and he gets things done. But where the council is involved, he blows up; the council grows stubborn. And what's going to happen to the army while they're squabbling? Just the same, if I can keep him calmed down, I think we can handle this."

"It has to be managed."

"Here's my suggestion, Jim. I'll stay here, handle these men and get an army organized. There's no one I'd rather have in San Antonio than you right now. I want someone there I can depend on; and besides, you have a good company of scouts. I want patrols as far south as the Rio Grande so we'll know when Santa Anna's ready to move."

"I'll leave today," Bowie promised.

He rode off that evening, too soon to learn the council's next move. Over Houston's protest they voted for an invasion of Mexico, directed the commander in chief of the army to organize an expedition, seize Matamoros at the mouth of the Rio Grande and prepare for further action in the south. But Houston found an answer to his problem. He made out the orders for the expedition as directed, on December seventeenth, and as commander in chief he selected Jim Bowie. He sent the order to Goliad as if in ignorance of Bowie's whereabouts, instructed him to capture Matamoros "if practical." If not, he was ordered to seize and hold a strategic part of the frontier.

Bowie learned of the grandiose scheme at San Antonio. John, Fannin and Grant all dreamed of it. There were four hundred foreign volunteers here, men from the United States hoping for adventure.

"Who's going to defend Texas while all this is going on?" Bowie asked.

"The best defense is attack," Fannin retorted.

"Remember we're fighting for the democratic constitution," was Dr. Grant's argument. "Texians aren't the only ones who believe in it. Once we enter Mexico the Liberals will flock to us."

The Long Barracks at the Alamo had been converted into a hospital. That was where Bowie visited Grant. He had been wounded in the recent fighting.

"You aren't serious about invading Mexico, Doctor. What could we accomplish—a few hundred men far from home—against Santa Anna's thousands? Remember Zacatecas."

"I am remembering, Bowie. Shall we wait here and suffer the same fate in Texas or shall we gather strength in the neighboring states?"

"We're not waiting for the same fate here," Jim answered slowly. "We can win. We're more fortunate than Zacatecas because of our position. Santa Anna has to come to us across a rough frontier. We have the advantage."

"Then what happens to Coahuila? Will Texas be free while my state bows to the dictator?"

"That's the point, Doctor. You're thinking of Coahuila; I'm thinking of Texas. Your estates near Parras have been confiscated. You want them back, naturally, and to do that we must fight in Coahuila."

"They were confiscated because I am a patriot."

"Of course. If my home were there I'd want Texas' help in fighting the dictator, too. I understand that thoroughly. But being a Texian, I want first to safeguard my own state."

"You think only of Texas. You're selfish, Bowie."

"And you're thinking only of Coahuila, Grant."

When Bowie started to leave the doctor called him back. "Why did you come to me? Did you think I could stop this invasion?"

"I think you're behind it," Jim replied slowly.

They regarded each other silently for a moment. "I don't think you can stop it," the wounded man said finally.

"I'm going to try," Bowie promised.

Houston's order placing Bowie in command of the Mexi-

can expedition reached him on Christmas Day. He read it with puzzled eyes, and noted with satisfaction the latitude it gave him. If this is impractical I'm instructed to seize and hold some other strategic part of the frontier. In a way I've already done that. Juan Seguin's on the Rio Grande right now.

Jim decided to move to Goliad, however, get in touch with the force he was to command. Two of his wounded were able to ride with Mars; that made four in their company.

Mars Kirk and Henri Bertin had struck up a friendship. The one-eyed New Orleanian was able to sit up now. Mars went to say good-by.

"I guess being with Bowie you've ridden over most of Texas, haven't you?" the wounded man remarked.

"A good share of it at least."

"You haven't happened to run into a family named Hodges?"

Mars grinned. "I know them well, been there often."

"They're old friends of mine. Tell me about them."

"He's dead, you know. Killed at Velasco."

"I hadn't heard." Henri regarded his companion soberly. "Sybil—Mrs. Hodges—she's all right?"

"She's fine."

"And the children?"

Mars laughed. "You mean the girls? They're grown now. Jody's eleven and shooting up like a weed."

"Young ladies, eh? By Jorry, I should have realized." Henri's glance was shrewd. "Which of them is it you go to see?"

"Well, I like Jacqueline."

"Tell me, Kirk, is everything all right with them? I mean, since Aaron's death are they in comfortable circumstances? I don't mean to pry but I need to know. They're very old friends."

Mars told him of the Hodges plantation.

"There's not a finer place in Texas. You don't need to worry on that score."

"When you see Jacqueline again, tell her you saw her one-eyed uncle. Give them all my love," Bertin said in parting.

Bowie wrote Houston that week: *The time for an invasion of Matamoros is passed. I am fully informed of the situation, have scouts on the Rio Grande and other approaches to San Antonio. I hear Santa Anna is raising an army to invade Texas but at present Cos has only a thousand men at Laredo. How soon the enemy will move, I do not know, but I am sure they will strike at San Antonio. You know my opinion. If we can contain their army in the barren country between that city and the Rio Grande, we can be sure of victory. For this we need every available man.*

He was amazed at Houston's reply:

*I agree with you but am powerless to act. Nearly everyone here has "Matamoros fever." President Smith has sided with me but he lost his temper with the council, called them a pack of fools and worse, is vetoing their orders for invasion. The result of the quarrel is that he has dismissed the council until March first, saying in the meantime he'll do his duty as commander in chief, while they have removed him from office and replaced him with Lieutenant Governor Robinson. Smith is right but tactless and so now we have two governments and are accomplishing nothing.*

*The army is in the same situation. I'm the general commanding but I have no authority. Here's what has happened. Colonel Johnson left his post at San Antonio and appeared before the council asking authority to invade Mexico. They gave it to him. When the governor objected, Johnson withdrew on January sixth, then changed his mind and said he'd go on January seventh. While he was hesitating the council named Fannin to head the expedition. Now it has restored Johnson. The result is there are two commanders and, God knows, we may have two expeditions. I'm against it but all I can do is talk. I'm thoroughly disgusted with the way things are going.*

*To make matters worse, by today's dispatches I learn that as soon as you rode away, Grant left San Antonio, taking with him every able-bodied man. The only troops left there are the wounded in the hospital, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Neill. Neill is a good man but what can he*

*do? Grant took all his ammunition, his stores, even stripped the wounded of their boots and blankets, saying they didn't need them and his men were going off to fight. This confusion sickens me. Our army, what there is of it, is good. Its officers know how to fight. It's our leadership between battles which is incredible. It easily can ruin us.*

*I still believe in your plan. As long as we hold San Antonio Santa Anna can't invade Texas but we need an army to do it. Stay at Goliad, gather what forces you can. I'll see you there in a few days.*

Bowie cursed when he finished the letter. Then he sent couriers to Jess Leeman and Juan Seguin, who commanded the two patrols scouting the border. He had need of his men.

Houston arrived before they did. "A general without an army," he commented grimly. "The council has pulled my teeth. Johnson and Grant are at Refugio with four hundred men and I'm on my way there. The council has made Johnson independent of my command. I guess he's their new commander in chief, but I may be able to talk some sense into the men. We need an army of two thousand but if they'd just let me concentrate what we have, we could work wonders, you and I. We'd strike Santa Anna when he was strung out on the march. Half his army would never reach San Antonio and by that time we'd have enough men concentrated to hold the town. I estimate it will take a thousand men.

"Give me half that many and I'll hold San Antonio," Bowie volunteered.

"I'm sending you there, Jim, but I haven't the men to give you. Do what you can, but we can't hold the place without an army. Remember there isn't even an ounce of powder in the town right now. Unless they give me authority I won't be able to help you. In that case, the only thing you can do is to demolish the fortifications and evacuate the place. Meanwhile, I've sent word to Patton's company to go to San Antonio. I've also ordered Dimmitt to raise as many men as possible and get there quick. How many men have you?"

"None with me. I have two patrols out scouting and have sent for them. There'll be twenty of us if only one gets in, nearly fifty when my whole command is united."

Houston wrote to the governor:

*Colonel Bowie will leave here in a few hours for Bejar with a detachment of from 20-50 men. Capt. Patton's company it is believed are now there. I have ordered the fortifications in the town to be demolished and if you see fit I will remove all the cannon and other munitions to Gonzales and Copano; blow up the Alamo and abandon the place. . . . I have sent to Capt. Dimmitt to raise 100 or more men and march to Bejar forthwith. . . . I would myself have marched to Bejar with a force but the Matamoros fever rages so high I must see Colonel Ward's men.*

Jess Leeman's patrol arrived before Houston left. Some of the wounded had rejoined the troop; it was thirty strong. "We're riding at once, General," Bowie declared. Blaz Herrera arrived with a message from Seguin just before they left. "Santa Anna is concentrating troops in Laredo," he reported. "The time is growing short."

Conditions in San Antonio were worse than he had feared. Neill, left in command, had a hospital instead of a fort. "And they call this a garrison." Neill was bitter. "Look at them, Bowie. Sick men, barefoot. Not even enough blankets to go around. Do you know how I've kept them alive? Gaspar Flores and Luiz Navarro have furnished us flour and beeves at their own expense. I've not had a dime from the governor or the council and Grant took every scrap of provisions we had. We've no lead nor powder. Wounded men with empty guns. Is this the way to fight a war?"

"Houston told me to blow up the Alamo and abandon the place if we couldn't get reinforcements."

"Doesn't he know this is the key to Texas?"

"He knows as well as we do," Bowie retorted glumly. "He's doing his best but they've parceled his army out among other leaders. It leaves the general without a command."

Neill's lips set in a thin line. "I won't leave. What about the people here? They're loyal; they've kept my men alive. Can I run away and abandon them now?"

Bowie held out his hand. "I'm glad to hear you say it, Colonel. I feel the same way."

These were Bowie's friends; he made the needs of the garrison known, remembering the stores he had seen in the great haciendas. "Send us all the powder and lead you have," he urged. "We'll get food here but the town has been stripped of ammunition."

The response was immediate. Twelve kegs of powder arrived on a creaking wagon from the Seguin plantation; fifteen from the Flores with two hundred pounds of lead; the de la Garza, Navarro and Ruiz families added their contributions. To augment the lead every available scrap of metal was added, chains, broken tools, even bells were heaped on the supply wagons.

Bowie reported his progress to Houston by letter. He had another report from Seguin. There were now two thousand enemy troops at Laredo with five thousand more on the way. Another detachment of his *Leoncitos* was scouting in the Rio Frio section. Bowie was glad to serve under Neill and said so.

Houston wrote in reply, *Travis is on his way to join you. He's been in charge of recruiting and I thought he'd have a greater force. He appears to have only thirty men. We've had two letters from him protesting against going to San Antonio. This morning he says if we don't change his orders he'll feel it due to himself to resign his commission. I must admit I don't understand Travis, but his men are needed there and I'll see that they come.*

Captain Patton had arrived but he had only six men instead of the expected hundred. Colonel Bonham was with him. Green B. Jameson rode in alone the following day. He was an engineer, trained at West Point. "We need you," Bowie greeted him. "We have a lot of cannon left here by Cos and you can show us how to mount them."

Their force was too small to defend the whole town. Jameson urged that the Alamo be converted into a fort. Its stone

walls were strong. "I'll build bastions to mount the guns. Give us enough men and we can hold it until help comes."

"How many is enough?" Neill demanded.

Jameson looked around the position. "We should have a thousand but five hundred might do it."

Reinforcements trickled in. Travis arrived two weeks after Bowie, his threat to resign forgotten. A week later Colonel David Crockett rode in. With him were twelve volunteers from the States, eight from Tennessee, two from Kentucky and one each from Virginia and Pennsylvania. Among them was Colonel Joseph Washington.

Crockett was greeted enthusiastically. Everyone knew by reputation the eccentric Tennessee congressman, as noted for his prowess as a woodsman as for his shrewd humor. He introduced Colonel Washington around. "Looks like we're long on colonels here. If we could just find us a private we'd have us an army," he remarked.

With the addition of this force the garrison now numbered one hundred and fifty-six men, about half of them able-bodied.

Neill called a conference of officers a couple of days later. "I'm called home," the commander explained. "Cholera. I'll be away about three weeks. It's up to you to select a leader to act in my absence."

"That isn't necessary. There are only two regularly commissioned officers here," Travis pointed out. "You and I. The command naturally passes to me."

The others listened in silence.

Neill looked uncomfortable.

"Wal, we can't all be gen'rals," Crockett observed. "Some of us will have to do the fightin'."

"Travis is right, of course," Neill admitted. "Naturally he'll be in command of the regular troops but a lot of these men are volunteers. I thought it would simplify matters if we chose a commander."

Travis refused to yield. "The volunteers are at liberty to choose their own officers in the usual way but I'll be in command of the post."

There was no further discussion and Neill turned over

the command. Travis ordered all troops to be paraded in the Plaza de las Yslas the following day.

"What for?" Bowie asked.

"The volunteers will elect their officers at that time."

The new commander wore his best uniform to review the garrison. Bowie was chosen to lead the volunteers.

Travis was still smarting when he confronted Bowie. "You'll get along all right, Colonel, as long as you remember I'm in charge here and take your orders from me."

Bowie didn't reply. He stalked away, muttering to himself.

The following morning Blaz Herrera rode in with a report from Seguin. Santa Anna had reached the border; there were three thousand troops in Laredo now. Bowie took him straight to Travis.

"Don't trouble me with these damn Mexican lies," Travis said. "I'm surprised you're fooled by 'em, Bowie."

"What do you mean 'damn Mexican lies'?" Bowie demanded fiercely. "This is one of my scouts."

"I meant what I said—damn Mexican lies. You can't believe a thing they say. I wouldn't trust any Mexican. They're all traitors."

"You're a liar."

Travis sprang to his feet. "You're talking to your superior officer."

"I'm talking to a young fool who thinks he's playing soldier. Who do you think's been feeding this garrison? Loyal Mexicans. Where has every ounce of our powder come from? Loyal Mexicans. More than half of my company are Mexicans and there are no better troops in this army. When one of my men comes in with a report like this I'll not stand by and have him insulted."

"Go to your quarters, Bowie. I'm relieving you of your command."

"You're doing no such thing. My men will take orders from no one but me."

"You realize what you're saying? This is insubordination."

"It's the plain truth whatever you want to call it. I'll not turn my command over to you."

"I'll parade the garrison and have you publicly arrested," Travis shouted.

"Go ahead. I'll parade my troops, too. We'll see how far you get." Bowie stomped from the room, taking Herrera with him.

Travis immediately ordered Baugh, his adjutant, to call out the troops. Bowie ordered out his volunteers. Crockett's and Patton's men joined his company. Travis looked from one formation to the other uncertainly, then decided this wasn't the time to get rid of his subordinate. Infuriated, Travis dismissed his men.

Jess followed Bowie to the *cantina,* watched in troubled silence as he ordered rum.

"He thinks he can get rid of me. Says I have no authority," Jim grumbled when Leeman asked what this was all about. "By God, I'll show him whether I have any authority or not! Come on."

He took his bottle with him as they left to round up some of his men.

"Are you sure you know what yo're doin', Jim?" Jess was troubled.

"You're damned right I do. Are you with me or Travis?"

Jess grunted. "You didn't need to ask that. Go on; we'll follow you."

At the city jail they freed Antonio Fuentes.

"By whose orders?" the jailer asked.

"Mine," Bowie retorted.

D. H. Barre, a private in the cavalry company, was confined in the Alamo guardhouse. Bowie liberated him, too. "Run to Travis. Tell him it was by Bowie's order," he told the corporal of the guard.

No one opposed him. He lost interest in the game and retired to his own quarters where he emptied the rest of his bottle.

# 23

## *The Hodges Raid*

ANTONIO LÓPEZ DE SANTA ANNA was determined to crush the rebellion in Texas swiftly. He had with him his ablest generals: Filisola, Castrillon, Sesma, Gaona, Andrade, Urrea, Tolsa, Woll and Cos, his brother-in-law.

"But I am on parole," Cos protested. "I've given my word not to fight the Texians again."

"Poof! What's your word to rebels and traitors, Martin?"

"I am a man of honor."

"Very good when you're dealing with men of honor, my dear General. Traitors and dogs have no honor. You will go with me."

Cos stared at the swarthy little man before him and realized argument was useless. Santa Anna's angry mood would admit no dissent.

They were in Laredo. The troops were gathering, soon the expedition would be launched. "I have an army of six thousand men," said Santa Anna. "We will move directly against San Antonio. The sooner we meet them the better. I have prepared here the order of our advance in five divisions. Sesma will lead the vanguard with a thousand five hundred and forty-one men and six guns; Gaona will have the first brigade, sixteen hundred men and six guns; Tolsa will have the second infantry and Cos's troops, more than eighteen hundred men in all, and six more guns; Andrade will command the cavalry; Urrea will have a mixed brigade, half cavalry, half infantry, six hundred men, and one gun. I will advance with a picked detachment, directing the whole army. Horses and mules have been assembled for the equipment. Sesma will leave here day after tomorrow, February twelfth. I will advance the same day from San Juan Bautista. Water will be carried in bags; men will march on half rations. Nothing must stop us; any halt short of San

Antonio would be a calamity. That is our nearest base."

The march began on schedule. It was a toilsome march over an arid route in the worst month of the year. Twice they encountered chill northers which drenched them with cold rain and bogged down their wagon trains and artillery. Most of the time they marched under a scorching sun, and water was rationed carefully. To make matters worse, two thousand women accompanied the army. Each soldier took his woman along; she did his cooking and performed the camp chores. They were an additional drain on the meager supplies, slowed down progress. Only Santa Anna's will lashed them on.

"I've never seen him like this," Sesma told General Filisola. "Is this the same man who spends weeks in the country resting; who never has time to bother with his government?"

The general shrugged. "*Quien sabe?* Maybe he stores up energy for the hour he'll need it. He isn't human now."

On the night of the twentieth the head of the exhausted column reached the Medina River. "Tomorrow we'll push on and surprise the town," Santa Anna told Sesma. "Bring up your troops. Let no one camp until he reaches the river."

It was long after midnight before the last straggler was in and by then the rain had started, a cold, steady downpour. Santa Anna waited for the dawn, then discovered the river was so swollen that the ford was impassable. His rage knew no limit. "The rain saved them," he complained bitterly. "The rain—just when I had them in my hand."

The water receded somewhat by noon, was still too high for the infantry and artillery, but two troops of lancers swam across with their horses and Santa Anna went with them to reconnoiter the town. When no Texas patrols were encountered his mood grew savage. "I had achieved a complete surprise, the place would already be mine if it weren't for the rain. We haven't met a single Texas scout. They told me Bowie commanded in San Antonio but I don't believe it. Surely he isn't such a fool."

They were returning from this patrol when they intercepted two horsemen. The Texians were well armed, their

horses good. "Where are you going?" Santa Anna demanded of one.

"To San Antonio. It is Sunday and there will be a fandango tonight."

"What's your name?"

"We are the brothers Garcia, señor, rancheros as you can see."

"This far west?"

"No, señor, there are no ranches this far west." He evaded the trap. "We've been hunting strayed cattle."

The dictator was only half convinced. "You go well armed for such an errand."

"It is Indian country, señor, and then there are these *Texanos*. Sometimes one has trouble with them. They are in rebellion against our President, señor. Perhaps you have heard."

"And yet you go to San Antonio. The *Texanos* have an army there."

"One company isn't an army, señor. Twenty men. We go and come as we please. Tonight we will dance at the Casa Rodriguez. The *Texanos* will not even know we are there."

Santa Anna laughed.

"You're an impudent fellow."

"I only go my way, señor."

The dictator looked at Sesma, his dark eyes aglow. "Why not? I'd enjoy a fandango and if these brave fellows are telling the truth——" He shrugged.

Sesma was more wary. "You'd stick your neck in a trap," he growled.

"I could take a dozen good men with me while you are bringing up all our cavalry. We needn't wait for the rest of the army."

The adventure appealed to him. The risk didn't seem great if these two rancheros were telling the truth. He liked the drama of it. It would make a good legend to tell about the dictator and he thrived on such tales. He overruled Sesma's protests, determined to go. He took fourteen men and the two prisoners with him. "Gather up two troops of lancers and ride to the Alazan," he instructed. "If everything is

favorable I'll send you a message. We'll capture the town tonight."

They found a clump of willows along Alazan Creek south of the town and waited for darkness. During the afternoon another prisoner was captured, a boy of twelve, frightened at the sight of their uniforms.

"How many *Texanos* in San Antonio, boy?"

"*Quien sabe?* Many though. They are very strong."

Santa Anna boxed his ears. "Tell me the truth or I'll have you strung up to that tree."

"It is the truth, señor capitán. I do not know their number but there are many of them and they are strong."

Santa Anna stared bleakly at the two rancheros. "Tie them up," he ordered. "If they have lied to me they will be hanged."

"This boy is excited," was the bland answer. "We were there a week ago and counted only twenty of them."

The dictator hesitated. This adventure appealed to him but its risk now seemed too great. "We'll forget the fandango," he decided. "Tie them up securely. If they escape someone will pay for it." He had the frightened boy brought along too as he returned to his camp on the Medina.

The two rancheros escaped that night. The guard thought they were disarmed but one of them had a knife hidden in his boot and cut the ropes which bound them. They crept undetected from the camp, and halted at an outpost where they stabbed the sentry and stole two horses.

"I thought they had us, Juan."

"I thought we had him," was the reply. "If it hadn't been for that boy he'd have walked into our trap. Wouldn't Don Jaime have been pleased if his *Leoncitos* had bagged Santa Anna himself before a single shot was fired?"

"It was bad luck. We might have ended the war."

Juan Seguin and Blaz Herrera rode on into the town with their story.

When he discovered his prisoners had escaped, Santa Anna abandoned hope of a swift surprise, crossed his artillery on Monday and reached San Antonio Tuesday in full force. Messengers announced the other columns were com-

ing up fast but there was no need to wait for them. A cavalry patrol sent into the town reported back that the Texians had fled to the mission fortress on the east bank. He occupied the town.

"Hoist the 'No Quarter' flag from the cathedral," he ordered. "I'll show these rebels what to expect." He ordered a six-pounder trained across the river and fired as a summons. The Texians fired back.

Then his aide, José Batres. came in search of him. "They want a parley, Your Excellency. What shall I do?"

"Get a pen. I'll show them what they can expect." Santa Anna dictated the message:

*As the Aide-de-Camp of his Excellency the President of the Republic, I eply to you according to the order of his Excellency that the Mexican army cannot come to terms under any conditions with rebellious foreigners to whom there is no recourse left it they wish to save their lives than to place themselves immediately at the disposal of the Supreme Government from which alone they may expect clemency after some considerations. God and Liberty!*
*José Batres to James Bowie.*

When Batres met three Texas officers at the bridge under a flag of truce there was a misunderstanding.

"We can't treat with rebels," Batres announced.

"Then why did you ask for this truce?"

"We didn't ask it. We saw your flag."

"Your bugle sounded a parley and we respected it. We didn't ask for it."

"Neither did we but since you are here this is our message." He handed them the note Santa Anna had dictated.

The dictator had planned to make the Veramendi Palace his headquarters; when he found it badly ruined from the recent battle. he chose the Flores house for his residence. General Castrillon had arrived and they were dining together. The dictator was in a genial mood.

"This will be an easy victory. I always have luck in San Antonio, General. You know I was only a young lieu-

tenant the last time I was here. It was when Arredondo crushed the rebellion of 1813." He laughed. "I shall never forget it. They called me a butcher in Zacatecas. That was nothing to what we did here then. We sacked the town. Arredondo turned his conscript soldiers loose on the women. It was the only time I've seen a place systematically raped. You'd think these fools would remember it, wouldn't you?"

Castrillon's lean face turned somber. "It was a criminal thing, Your Excellency. Thank God those days are passed."

"You're too damned noble, Castrillon. I'm not sure they wouldn't profit by a dose of the same medicine now."

"You're joking, of course."

Santa Anna laughed. "Women have always been the spoils of war, General. You're an old soldier; you should have learned. If I enjoy a likely wench in my bed, why should I deny my troops the same pleasure? And that reminds me that I've not seen a pretty face since I arrived. Are all rebels old and ugly? I need a woman here."

"Perhaps they remember better than you think, Your Excellency," was the dry retort. "Half the town is deserted."

"Well, keep your eyes open, my friend. If you see a wench that's worth my time let me know."

Castrillon did not reply.

Bowie sent for Mars. Sybil was on his mind, and Jacqueline. When the fighting reached here they'd no longer be safe. He'd tried to warn them. He fretted over this, wondering what more he could say that would induce them to leave. "Have you been to the Hodges lately?" he asked when young Kirk entered.

"No, sir, and I'm worried."

"I'll give you a pass if you want to go. They should leave at once; they haven't an hour to waste. I'd tell them that if I were you, Mars."

"I'll make them understand."

"Just one thing more, son. Remember this was your idea, not mine. Understand?"

Worry spurred Mars. He rode fast. Sybil's quick glance took in his lathered horse. "Are you carrying dispatches?"

He shook his head. "I had to see you. You must leave here, Mrs. Hodges. This place is no longer safe."

"Has there been a battle?"

"Not yet."

She relaxed. "Where's the point in running before a shot's been fired? Our army knows how to fight."

"We'll make a stand at the Alamo," Mars promised. "If we get reinforcements quickly we can win, and without San Antonio as a base Santa Anna can't invade Texas. If we fail, your place will be overrun."

"Did Colonel Bowie send you with this message?"

He hesitated, shook his head.

"Yet you know his plan."

"If we'd been fighting according to Bowie's plan we'd have hit Santa Anna before he ever reached San Antonio. We missed that opportunity because they wouldn't listen to him. This stand is our last resort, the last chance to keep the enemy from raiding our settlements." He was looking at Jacqueline as he spoke.

"I would rather stay here," Sybil answered slowly. "This is my home, I want to protect it. But you're right, Mars; I must think of the children. We will have to go."

Their preparations took a full day. They planned to leave the next morning but at sundown a Mexican cavalry patrol galloped up, forty men commanded by Lieutenant Vicente Pascual. He was foraging for supplies. The loaded wagons stood in the yard; they lacked only teams.

"What do you want?" Sybil met him at the door.

"Everything we find." He grinned. "An army the size of ours needs supplies and you have plenty here, horses, wagons, food—" his eyes swept the room—"and you have furnishings here fit for the president's own quarters. Let no one leave this house, señora. You are all prisoners until my work is finished here."

His insolence angered her. She realized her helplessness —that added to her fury. Her food would nourish the enemy; they would ride her horses, carry off her supplies in her own wagons. Like it or not, she was helping Santa Anna. Outwardly, she remained calm; this officer shouldn't

guess the scheme brewing in her mind. "Come in, Lieutenant," she invited. "You are hungry, I know. A beef will be killed for your men but you shall dine with us."

He entered confidently, smiled when he saw Camille. This would be a pleasant duty after all. Sybil excused herself on the pretense of directing preparations for the meal. "Where's Jody?" she asked Jacqueline as soon as she left the room.

"I don't know. He was here when we saw the soldiers coming but he disappeared. I've been trying to find him. I'm worried about him, Mother."

Sybil remembered Aaron's rifle in the carriage. "If he gets to that gun——"

"He can't. The soldiers found it," Jacqueline told her.

Sybil sighed with relief. "Now listen to me, Jacqueline. We won't feed Santa Anna's army. You must help. Go to the slave quarters; bring Ben and Dace to me. I'll be waiting in the south barn. If anyone tries to stop you, tell them you're making arrangements to feed the soldiers. Tell the black boys the same story. You understand?"

"What are you going to do?"

"We're going to burn the barns after we've run off all the stock we can. Yes, and the house must go too. There's no help for it, Jacqueline. Now do as I told you."

It was already dark when Jacqueline brought the two trusted slaves to her mother. The unsuspecting lieutenant was being entertained by Camille, who knew nothing of their plan.

The soldiers were gathered about four fires under the oaks in the yard, careless, laughing, waiting for their promised beef.

"Get boys to help you. They must run the horses away. Tell them to drive them as far as they can," Sybil instructed briskly. "The cattle, too, and the hogs. What they can't drive must be scattered. The soldiers must get nothing."

Dace nodded his understanding.

"That job is for others. You will set fire to the barns, both of them at the same time. This is yours, Dace. Ben, you will take the other. Pull down hay to start it; be sure it's

spreading well and then run. The soldiers will kill you if they catch you. You understand that?"

Ben shuffled his feet uneasily. Dace rolled his eyes. "Yas'm, Miz Sybil, reckon us do."

She measured them sharply. "Are you afraid?"

"Yas'm. Us skeered, sho' nuff."

"Now listen to me. I'll keep the soldiers busy at the house. You'll be all right as long as you do just as I say. You trust me, don't you?"

"Jes' tell us, Miz Sybil," Dace replied earnestly; "jus' say what is it an' then don' fret yo'self."

"The fires must all start at once. You watch the house for your signal. When you see a flare at the back door it will be time."

The two women hurried back. The kitchen was connected with the house by a gallery. They dodged the yellow patches of light from its windows and saw Midge and two helpers busy with supper as they let themselves quietly in.

"Go upstairs; heap the feather beds on the floor." Sybil pressed a lighted candle into her daughter's hand. "Watch the window. When you see my flare at the back door, light them. Then get out quick. There won't be much time."

Jacqueline kissed her mother. "I have the easiest part. What are you going to do?"

They were in the dining room. Sybil pointed at the hearth where a warm blaze glowed. "It must start everywhere at once. There's no bedding here; it will be slower to take hold. When everything is ready I'll give the signal. Now hurry."

When she was alone she drew the curtains, then raked the burning logs out into the room, heaped chairs and rugs about the starting flames. Once she hesitated at the feel of smooth mahogany, then set her lips tighter and made fuel of the chair. She watched the fire spread; when its progress satisfied her, she yanked down a curtain and poked its end into the blaze until it caught. Then she stepped to the back door and stood waving it like a torch. She waved it until its heat scorched her fingers. She had no more use for the signal, behind her the windows had turned bright.

*"Fuego!"* The soldiers had seen the fire.

She tried to re-enter the house, found her way blocked and ran around to the front door, calling Jacqueline at the top of her voice. A red glare filled the yard, in its light she saw Jody running toward her. She was conscious of the turmoil, the hoarse shouts, the running figures; all this was a confused background for her anxiety. She reached the steps just as Jacqueline came running through the door. "Thank God, you're safe!" Her voice was strained.

"I'm all right, Mother." Jacqueline drew her away from the heat. She could hear Camille whimpering near by. They were all safe.

Sybil remembered to look toward the barns then. Both were torches, adding their glow to the weird light; they flecked the sky with showering sparks, mock stars that scorched the night. She could see men running there, swarming black ants silhouetted against the flames.

The lieutenant caught her roughly by the arm. "You did this!"

"Of course." She saw the anger in his face and was glad because of it.

The officer swore and shoved her toward a gaping soldier. "Tie her up," he ordered brusquely.

"Don't you touch her!" Jody darted forward, looking very small in this grotesque light. "Don't you touch her," he repeated.

"Shut your mouth, boy, or you'll be sorry."

Somewhere he had found an old pistol. When the soldier grabbed Sybil's wrist Jody fired. The man fell.

The boy attempted to reach his mother; she tried to shield him with her arms and was knocked aside by a blow aimed at him. She didn't see what happened; she heard the blows, the crunch of a rifle butt, the hacking of a sword. Camille was screaming. She recognized Jacqueline's voice. "Let me go, let me go!" Sybil groped blindly forward until another blow knocked her unconscious.

# 24

## *The Siege Begins*

THE morning after his quarrel with Travis, Bowie was awakened by Jess Leeman. With him was Rives, one of the scouts. "Juan Seguin sent him," Jess explained.

"Santa Anna is on his way. Three thousand men have already crossed the Rio Grande; that many more will follow," the messenger reported. "Seguin told me to ask you to meet him at the Sabinal River if reinforcements have come. By then the enemy lines will be stretched thin. He says it's the best place to strike."

"I know." Bowie stared bleakly at the messenger. "But there are no reinforcements to send." He sat on the edge of the bed, thinking. "Find Ramón Navarro for me, Jess. I must try to get in touch with Houston. Rives, you wait here. We're going to Travis."

"He won't listen," Jess grumbled.

Travis' office was in the Long Barracks at the Alamo. As Bowie marched across the wide plaza, men paused to stare. After yesterday's scene they expected trouble. Travis seemed to share this feeling. When he saw his visitor he rose as if to meet an antagonist.

"Santa Anna's on his way. There's fighting ahead," Bowie announced.

"More rumors?" The colonel shrugged.

"This is no time for us to quarrel, Travis. The fault's been partly mine, I guess. We must end this foolishness, save our fighting for the enemy."

Travis showed his astonishment. "I never expected this from you, Bowie."

"I didn't expect it of myself. I'm ashamed of what happened yesterday. We need to work together if two men ever did. I'm willing to try."

Still Travis hesitated. "I think I should explain that I

wrote a complaint about you last night, Colonel Bowie, demanding that you be withdrawn from my command. After what you have said I'm sorry I wrote that letter. Everyone knows your reputation for courage, sir. I'll be proud to work with you if you'll let me."

Bowie held out his hand, Travis took it. Then because of the previous letter Travis wrote another and asked Bowie to sign it with him.

*Commandancy of Bexar*
*February 14, 1836*

*His Excellency Henry Smith*
*Governor of Texas*
*Sir:*

*By an understanding of today Col. James Bowie has the command of the volunteers of the garrison and Col. W. B. Travis of the regular and the volunteer cavalry. All general orders will henceforth be signed by both until Col. Neill's return.*

*We have the honor to be etc.*

*W. Barrett Travis*
*Comd. of cavalry*
*James Bowie*
*Comd. of volunteers*

Travis watched as Bowie affixed his signature. "The important thing is that we hold this post," he said.

"What about this messenger?"

Travis bit his lip. "I think the country's wild with rumors. Let's not argue about one more."

"You don't understand. This is one of my men. He's been sent by Juan Seguin, a trusted lieutenant. In such circumstances it ceases to be a rumor."

"They're Mexicans."

"Yes. And loyal ones."

"I wish I could understand you, Bowie. I wonder if it makes sense. I'm fighting against the Mexicans and you're fighting for them."

"That's the truth."

"Then we're on different sides."

"Sometimes. What you don't realize is that the things we're fighting for are bigger than the people who pull the triggers."

"I'm fighting for freedom," Travis retorted. "And against tyranny."

"Big words! I guess everyone has some such explanation for the reason he fights. The point is we're all Texians. What does it matter whether a man speaks Spanish or English if he's willing to die for what he believes? I tell you there are no men more loyal than these."

"You may be right, Bowie. For your sake I hope your trust is deserved. I don't want to start our quarrel over but I must give you an honest answer. I don't trust them. Personally I doubt there's any truth to it. Let's not bring this up again between us."

Bowie looked at Rives. "Very well," he replied.

Outwardly the breach between the two men was healed. Still Travis refused to believe the warnings which arrived daily. He commanded the cavalry but refused to send out a patrol.

Bowie kept his messengers busy, avoided his co-commander. "It's better this way," he told Crockett. "If I see him I'm apt to speak my mind and that wouldn't do now."

He worked furiously, helping Green Jameson fortify the Alamo. All were agreed on the necessity of this; with their few men this was the most they could hope to hold. Built as a mission, its stone walls would repel infantry but there were no emplacements for cannon. They solved this problem by erecting earthen parapets inside the plaza for the guns. Thus mounted they could shoot over the walls. "With a thousand men we could hold this place forever." Jameson remarked as he watched one of the cannon being swung into position.

"If I'd had a thousand men I'd have cut Santa Anna to pieces before he got this far," was Bowie's reply.

"Why do they call it the Alamo." Mars once asked, "when its real name is Mission San Antonio de Valero?"

Bowie explained. "It's been used as a fort for years and the company stationed there the longest was *El Compañia*

*Volante del Alamo de Parras.* You know how people are. That was too much of a mouthful so gradually they came to be known as *Los Alamos* and their quarters were called the Alamo."

The mission had originally been built around two plazas, the larger four hundred and sixty-two feet long and one hundred and sixty-two feet wide. It was not a perfect rectangle, however, being wider at the north end than at the south. The main gate was in the center of the south wall, a porte-cochere defended by a one-story building which occupied most of this wall. Another row of houses, one story high, ran almost the length of the west wall. There were no buildings on the north, while in the middle of the east wall stood a two-story stone structure called the Long Barracks, all that was left of a convent which once had surrounded three sides of another courtyard here, one hundred and sixty-two feet square. This had been the most elaborate part of the mission. The building had been U-shaped with the mission chapel closing part of the south wall. Two-storied, arched galleries had enclosed the interior of this patio. Now only one of these wings was left standing and the church stood east of and outside the fortifications and connected with them only by a single wall. It had been abandoned and was in ruins. Its two towers, its dome and its arched roof had caved in seventy years before. Jameson first thought it best to leave this pile of rubble outside the fortifications, but its walls were stout, about four feet thick; it was too strong a position to abandon to the enemy. At its east end the debris was used to throw up a high ramp on which three cannon were mounted to command this approach. A wooden scaffolding was built inside on the north and south so that riflemen could fire over the walls. To connect it better with the other defenses a barricade was constructed from the southwest corner of the church, angling to the southeast corner of the walls. This was a palisade of sharpened logs planted upright, with a ditch in front of it and dirt thrown up behind to repel ordinary cannon shot.

Just three days after Bowie ended his quarrel with Travis he was hurt. He and Jameson were helping mount the largest

gun in their arsenal, an eighteen-pounder, on a high ramp built near the southwest corner of the main plaza. The cannon was in place but before its wheels were chocked it started to slip. Bowie leaped to grab the spokes, lost his balance and toppled from the parapet. It was a ten-foot drop; his back was badly wrenched and he was unable to rise. They carried him to his room in the south barracks and summoned a doctor. "I'll be all right," he assured them.

Jess took a look at his white face and wasn't so sure.

He had many visitors. The townspeople were uneasy. They were aware of Travis' hostility.

"Some of my men don't want to stay," Jess Leeman reported. "Can't say I blame 'em either. They dodge all over the country, tryin' to git in hyar with reports; an' then Travis calls 'em liars. It'd be diff'rent if you was up an' about, Jim. They sw'ar by you but they ain't anxious to fight fer Travis. They don't trust him."

Eighteen men had left the garrison.

"Bring them here," Bowie instructed. "I'll talk to them."

He did. One by one, Jess brought the remaining *Leoncitos* to Bowie's bedside.

Conditions in the town were equally unsettled. The messengers were believed there, regardless of Travis' doubt. Men remembered another conquest here, spoke of Bloody Zacatecas. More and more families left daily. Bowie sent for Father Refugio de la Garza and Francisco Ruiz, the acting alcalde.

"Ah, Don Jaime, it would be different if you were well," said the priest. "Our people believe in you. Now they are puzzled, wonder which is their enemy—Travis or Santa Anna."

"Do they need proof of our loyalty?" Ruiz demanded angrily. "Who feeds them? Who furnished their powder? It's hard to understand."

Bowie tried to find an answer. "We think of what we're doing in terms of men. I guess that's what confuses us. Consider Santa Anna. He has destroyed our constitution, made himself dictator. We've seen what's happened to the people of Zacatecas who opposed him. All of us hate the

things he stands for. But Santa Anna isn't Mexico. Mexico is all the people, you, me, everyone—all the things we hope to do and be. Perhaps that will explain Travis to you. He isn't Texas. Texas is all of us, all our beliefs. Why quarrel with him?"

"What about the families that are leaving?" Ruiz asked.

"They're wise. We know Santa Anna's record. If my family were here I'd get them out too."

"They can't all go," Father Refugio said. "My duty is here. If the town is to suffer I'll be needed."

"I'll stay too." Francisco Ruiz said. "The town will need leaders when Santa Anna comes. I think that's where I belong."

Ramón Navarro returned from his quest of Houston empty-handed. "He's gone to East Texas to treat with the Indians and won't be back for a couple of weeks."

Bowie's face settled into grim lines. He had pinned his hope on this man: Houston understood the situation. If he could get control of the scattered army, they'd have help. There was little chance of that with him away, the governor and council squabbling. I'll talk to Travis, he thought. One thing he can do—stir men. There are enough troops in Texas to hold this place if we can just bring them here.

For several days the families quitting the town, their wagons creaking with the weight of household treasures, had puzzled Travis. He tried to find the meaning of it. "It is spring, time to put in crops, señor. We are moving to the country." This was the only answer he could get.

"Are they all farmers here?" he asked Bowie.

"They know Santa Anna is coming."

"And they're running away." Travis' eyes blazed. "I told you they weren't loyal."

"These are families," Jim reminded him. "We can't protect them. If I had a family here it would be on the move too."

"But they lied to me. They didn't tell me the real reason they were leaving."

"Would you have believed them, Travis? Men have tried to tell you and you wouldn't listen."

Travis still sent out no scouts. He did place a sentry in the tower of San Fernando Cathedral, but when this lookout rang the bell it was Sunday and no one heeded it at first. They mistook it for a church call. When Travis finally was summoned he again refused to believe.

"It was Mexican cavalry," the lookout said, "west of the Alazan. I'm sure, I could see their lances."

Travis looked and saw nothing. "You're lying," he said, and placed another sentry there.

The next day Seguin and Herrera arrived, told of their effort to lure Santa Anna into the town. Bowie sent for Travis. "The most fantastic tale I ever heard," he said. "Can you imagine the President of Mexico, the man who thinks he's the new Napoleon, riding out with a squad of cavalry and nearly falling into so simple a trap? It doesn't make sense."

"I've seen Santa Anna many times," Seguin retorted. "There can be no mistake."

"Oh, I hadn't heard you and he were such good friends," Travis scoffed.

Bowie stopped Seguin's angry reply. "You forget I sent Juan to the border to watch the enemy," he said. "He's been in Laredo, mingled with their troops, and kept me fully informed. He knows what he's talking about." He turned to his lieutenant. "Thanks, Juan. You did well. It was no fault of yours the trick didn't work. If it hadn't been for that scared boy who spilled the beans we'd have trapped their general and ended the war before it started."

After Travis was gone Seguin threatened to leave. "He called me a liar—*me!* Juan Seguin! I would have killed him right then if it hadn't been for you."

"Sometimes I wonder how brave men can be such fools," Bowie replied wearily. "He was wrong, Juan, but I'm the one he insulted, not you. You're of my company, don't you see? He'll soon learn his mistake and then if he's half the man I think he is, he'll tell you so. But you—you can't leave me now. I need you here. I need every man I can get."

Seguin was still seething but for Bowie he stayed.

"I've sent for help," Travis told Jim later. "I felt you should know. When my messages to the governor brought no result I sent Colonel Bonham to Fannin. He has four hundred men and he'll come when he understands our position. With a force like that we can hold this place indefinitely. He should be here any day."

"If he'll only come."

"He will. That's why I sent a man like Bonham. He'll make him understand our need and the importance of holding this place."

It rained all that night. By morning the streets were ankle-deep in puddles, the plazas soft with mud. After another conference with Bowie, Travis finally consented to send out scouts.

"I don't understand it. Santa Anna's army should be here by now," Bowie fretted.

"I told you it was a false alarm," Travis replied, but he agreed to the precaution and sent John Smith, the scout, and Captain Sutherland on a patrol.

They ran into Mexican cavalry, in strong force, not far west of the town. They were seen and pursued. Within sight of the walls Sutherland's horse slipped; the mud had balled on its unshod feet. The captain was pinned under the animal. Seeing his predicament Smith went back to help him. The captain's knee was injured in the fall and he couldn't stand alone. The scout boosted him into the saddle, with the enemy closing on them fast. They made the walls safely with a few bullets whistling harmlessly overhead as they rode in the gate. The sentry in the church tower had watched their flight, already had rung the alarm.

Travis met them at the gate. "Now we know where we stand" was his calm comment.

Sutherland fell when he tried to dismount and Travis helped him up. "That's too bad, Captain. Looks as if you're out of the fighting before it starts."

"I shoot with my hands; there's nothing wrong with them, Colonel."

Travis smiled. "I have another job for you. Can you ride with that game leg?"

Sutherland assured him that he could.

"All right. I want to get a couple of messages out of here. It's up to you to get through their cavalry."

"Better let me go with him, Colonel," John Smith volunteered. "Two are better than one. I know we can get through."

"All right, get ready. I'll soon have my dispatches written."

"And here I am, Colonel," Crockett spoke up. "Assign me to some place and my Tennessee boys will defend it all right."

"First I want to get every man into the Alamo." The garrison had been scattered about the town. "Take charge of that. Get all the provisions in you can, too. I'm going to see Bowie."

Jim had heard the shots, the ringing bell, knew what had happened.

"You were right, Colonel, and I was wrong," was the way Travis greeted him.

"No matter now, that's passed. What are your plans?"

"We're going to fight here as long as there's a man to hold a rifle. I figured Fannin should be here by today. He'll arrive any time. When he comes we'll have enough men to hold this place."

"And if he doesn't?"

Travis' face turned grim. "We'll still hold it. I agree with you, Bowie, this place is the key to Texas. We've got to hold it."

Travis explained his errand. "I'm sending dispatches at once, another to Fannin and one to Gonzales asking for help."

He had just finished his brief messages when Captain Baker reported. A Mexican bugler had sounded a parley. Major Morris and Captain Albert Martin were ordered to go out under a flag of truce to see what was wanted. When they returned with the demand for unconditional surrender it angered him. He ordered his cannon to fire a volley as his reply.

The main Alamo gate had been closed by an entrench-

ment mounting guns; the only exit now was a narrow door in the palisade by the church. The messengers slipped out that evening, Smith and Sutherland for Gonzales, a scout named Johnson to Fannin.

Santa Anna had already brought up his cannon and a desultory bombardment was begun. The Texians' fire was sporadic. "Don't shoot unless you have a mark," was Travis' order. "We have no ammunition to waste." The artillery was used sparingly.

Mars heard the shelling as he approached the town. He guessed what had happened, took cover along Salado Creek to the east, waited for dark to make his entrance. Here he met Colonel Bonham.

"Sounds as if the fighting's started," the colonel remarked.

"I'm sorry I'm not there."

"Plenty of time, Mars, plenty of time. We'll be there for the showdown."

They met Travis' messengers riding out as they came in and learned the best approach through the lines. "There's an *acequia* runs just east of the church," Sutherland suggested. "That's how we came through and we had no trouble. Follow its bank until you reach the chapel, then you're only a hundred and fifty feet or so from the palisade gate. You can make it."

They had no trouble.

"Would they listen to you?" was Bowie's first question when Mars entered.

"They were packing before I left. Everything's going to be all right."

"Good. That's been on my mind." A spasm of coughing shook Bowie. He could say no more. Mars brought him a drink of water when it seemed he couldn't stop.

"What's wrong, Don Jaime?"

"Just a little cold, I guess. I'll be all right."

When he took the glass Mars noticed how hot his hand was and saw the flush of his face. It worried him.

"Are they all right?" Bowie demanded when he could speak again.

"There's been no trouble there."

"Tell me about Jacqueline." It was the first time he'd spoken the name aloud. He liked its sound.

"You'd get a prejudiced report, Don Jaime. You see, I'm in love with her."

Bowie coughed again. "I know," he said finally. "I guess that's my answer." He turned the next question over in his mind before asking it. "Her mother—she's all right too, isn't she?"

"She's a remarkable woman. She has a man's work there at that plantation and she's done it well."

"Yes, yes, I know," he said dryly.

"But there's more to it than that, Don Jaime. You can see it in her children. They'd scarcely be what they are without her."

"Yes, she's done a good job," Jim said. He thought of that after he was alone.

Mars had another errand. He went straight from Bowie's quarters to the hospital to find Henri Bertin. "I've a message for you."

Henri's face lighted up. "You've seen the Hodges?"

"They all sent you their love. Why didn't you tell me you were practically a member of the family? Why, every last one of them wanted to come here when they heard you were hurt."

"You shouldn't have told them that. I'll be out of here in another day or two. I planned to see them as soon as I was able to ride but I guess I'll have to postpone that for a while." He nodded toward the door which rattled at the rumble of Santa Anna's cannon. "I've been thinking of them. Are they in a safe place?"

"They're leaving at once. They'll be all right."

Henri had many questions to ask. How did each one look? He wanted to know in detail. How tall were the girls? How was Jody? Was their mother as pretty as ever? Mars answered them the best he could.

Travis consulted Bowie that evening. "If we can arouse the country to our need we'll get help," he said.

"You're better than I am at that. You're good at words,

Travis. Give it to 'em strong, something to get their teeth into."

Travis sat down and wrote. It needed all his skill to phrase this message for it was addressed *To the People of Texas & all Americans in the world*——

*Fellow citizens & compatriots—I am besieged, by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna—I have sustained a continual Bombardment & cannonade for 24 hours & have not lost a man— The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion, otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword, if the fort is taken— I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, & our flag still waves proudly from the walls*—I shall never surrender or retreat. *Then, I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism & everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid, with all dispatch— The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily & will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days. If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his country*—VICTORY OR DEATH.

*William Barrett Travis*
*Lt. Col. comdt*

He read it aloud to Bowie. "That's it. That'll do it, Travis, if anything will. Where are you sending it?"

"It's going to Governor Smith but, as you see, it's addressed to everyone. What we need here is men."

"Good. Good. I think we can do it." A fit of coughing stopped him.

Several more messengers were sent out that night. Major Morris and Captain Martin to Gonzales to raise troops, Ben Highsmith to Fannin, Gilmore and Simpson with the dispatch for the governor. The enemy maintained a steady artillery fire but little damage was suffered. The men were in good spirits. They knew of the couriers sent out and hoped for reinforcements soon. Only twenty men were left in the hospital; all the wounded able to walk had reported

for duty. Each was needed. In addition to the garrison there were about forty women and children who had sought refuge here at the last minute, a number of Mexican families in addition to those of the garrison. These were placed in the church, it being farthest removed from the enemy's artillery.

That night volunteers were asked to burn some wooden dwellings just south of the Alamo walls which might obstruct their fire. In addition, wood was needed for cooking. Jess Leeman headed the party, Mars went along and again found himself beside Henri Bertin. "What are you doing here? I thought you were still abed."

"This is the best medicine I know. I was sick of lying there. Besides I'm all right now."

He still limped a little but he did his full share of the task. They carried back as much wood as possible before firing the buildings, and accomplished their mission undetected.

Bowie's cough had grown worse and word of his illness had spread. Men were disheartened by it—his name had come to be a symbol for them.

"They miss you, Colonel," Travis told him. "I do what I can. I make a point of seeing every man when I inspect the posts, try to encourage them and promise help, but they'd take it better from you."

"Then I'll go see them," Bowie declared. "Where's Sam? Tell him to fetch my clothes. I'm getting up." He was seized with a paroxysm of coughing when he tried to rise.

Travis eyed him anxiously. "You see? You can't do it, Colonel. You'll have to rest for when we need you later."

Nevertheless Bowie went. He had a litter made and was carried from post to post around the Alamo. Most of these men were old friends. They clustered around him, eager to hear his words.

"We'll get help," he promised confidently. "Why, with Fannin's men we can hold these walls forever and he's not far away. Remember we've got to hold this place. It's the key to Texas.

"Remember they can't whip us." That was always his

parting remark, and hearing it they believed him. They remembered San Saba and other battles that had seemed hopeless. Old Jim Bowie had never been whipped.

Davy Crockett saw the effect of these visits and went the rounds, too. He was a popular figure—men listened for his droll quips and had a deep affection for him. He'd brought his fiddle along and often he played it at night as he trudged from post to post. The Texians couldn't quit the walls; there were barely enough to man them. What sleep they had was snatched in fitful naps while some companion watched. There was no reserve to relieve them.

"What you want to hear, boys?" Crockett would ask, and his fiddle would sing out their favorite melodies from every point of the walls during the dreary nights.

There was violent fighting the third day of the siege. Santa Anna had moved troops to La Villita directly to the south where he tried to establish a battery. The Texians opened up on them with sharpshooters and artillery and drove them back. They returned to the attack stubbornly, again and again, and succeeded in establishing the artillery after dark, behind strong entrenchments.

The Texians sallied out again that night. There were some thatch-roofed huts near the bridge, a hundred yards to the south, which had served Santa Anna as a screen that day. These were destroyed. A strong breeze had blown up and it helped spread the flames.

The wind, from the north, carried a cold drizzle with it. Before, it had been warm. The temperature fell to thirty-nine that night and by morning the garrison was suffering. Many of the men were still barefoot. They had stood on duty in the rain; there were no campfires and their hands were stiff and numb.

Travis saw them shivering in the norther. "If they attacked now we'd be in a bad fix," he said. "Our men would have trouble loading their rifles with chilled fingers in this wind." Fires were needed but there was no wood. He organized an attack to remedy this. He asked for a hundred volunteers, fifty to drive the enemy back, as many more to cut wood and fetch it in.

There was a peach orchard just northeast of the walls, lightly held. Travis led them as they stormed through this, yelling as they charged, putting the enemy cavalry pickets to flight. They advanced about two hundred yards and held their ground stubbornly against two hastily organized counterattacks, while behind them axes rang as the orchard was demolished. Every tree was carried into the Alamo before he drew his thin line back.

Two messengers slipped into the fort that night. One brought word that Fannin would come. This news was received with cheers. The other was from Ruiz within the town. Three thousand of Santa Anna's troops had arrived, he said; as many more were on the way. So far civilians had been well treated. He was unaware that their messengers were getting through and volunteered to provide men for this service if they were needed.

*The Seguin and Flores haciendas have been looted for provisions,* he wrote. *Cavalry tried to raid the Hodges plantation but the women there burned it to the ground rather than let their stores fall into enemy hands. Mrs. Hodges' thirteen-year-old son was killed trying to defend his mother. She and her daughters are prisoners here but so far have not been molested otherwise.*

Bowie swore when he heard this news. Mars was violent in his worry. "Let me go. Don Jaime. Our messengers get through the lines every night. I'll slip in and get them out."

Bowie shook his head.

"But I must go. No telling what will happen to them there."

"Ruiz says they're being well treated. You wouldn't have a chance. son."

"I'm going anyway, whether you like it or not." Mars's chin set doggedly. "If the woman you loved was there——"

"If the woman I loved was there I wouldn't die for her, Mars; I'd try to live for her. When I've had to fight I have always tried to use my wits as well. weigh the chances, do what seemed best. If throwing you away would help them I might consent, but it wouldn't. You've got to trust me. boy. I'm thinking of them too. We'll do what is necessary

when the time comes. I give you my word for that. In the meantime you must take orders from me. Promise?"

Mars gave his pledge reluctantly.

When Henri Bertin heard the news of Sybil he went straight to Bonham.

"You've been through the lines, Colonel. What route did you take?"

"It's easy enough if you follow these little canals. There's plenty of cover and their guard is lax." He smiled. "I always have my Bowie knife in one hand, though. It's the proper weapon for this kind of business. A shot would bring them swarming down on you like a hive of bees."

Henri studied the *acequias* from the walls that afternoon. One angled across the north face of the Alamo from the east, turned south parallel with the west wall at the corner. From this a small ditch carried water straight through the main plaza of the mission. He made his plan carefully, confiding in no one.

He knew many people in the town and was sure of their help once he reached it. The main hazard would be in slipping across the river past enemy outposts.

The wall was twelve feet tall at the northwest corner. He chose this point because here the ditch was only a few yards away. As soon as it was dark he dropped over. The fall tore loose the bandage on his wounded leg. He shut his lips against the pain, dragged himself into the ditch and waited until its first harsh throbbing subsided. He made slow progress when he started. He was in double peril here—his friends on the walls could peer down into the *acequia,* would shoot if they saw a movement. There was a small lateral ditch south of the Alamo which emptied into the river. He made this safely, turned and reached the river's bank. Here his risk was greatest. He must reach the far shore undetected. He let himself slowly into the water, started to swim.

He had picked a great cottonwood tree for his destination; its deep shadow was inviting. Until now he had expected a challenge momentarily. He knew the danger, had calculated it calmly, accepting it as necessary to his mission. When his

fingers touched the sod of the opposite bank he allowed himself to hope for the first time; the greatest obstacle had been crossed.

The sentry had watched his coming and pointed him out to his companions. "Wait," the lieutenant cautioned. "If he's coming here there must be traitors in the town. We'll take him prisoner and find out what's going on." They grabbed for him as he scrambled up the bank. His knife slashed the first reaching arm, then they closed around him. There was an instant when he thought he'd win through. His blade freed him, swung in a relentless circle, found a second mark and a third. When the lieutenant fell he tried to turn and escape but his wounded leg made movement clumsy. He had fought in silence but the enemy was shouting now. More soldiers were running toward him. A shot whined past harmlessly; a gun butt crashed against his shoulder. He turned, at bay again, his knife still dangerous. A bayonet ended his fight. He sagged when it reached him and tried to catch himself, but there were others now, slashing, beating him down. He carried one more with him as he fell, gripping him with tight fingers. With his last strength he buried his knife in this antagonist.

# 25

## *A President Goes Wenching*

GENERAL CASTRILLON was present when Lieutenant Pascual reported his prisoners to Colonel Miñon. "What's this?" demanded the general. "Women prisoners?"

"Sir, it was a hostile act. One of my men was badly wounded."

"You fought a battle?"

The lieutenant turned red. "No, sir. A half-grown boy with a pistol did it."

"A child attacked a troop of cavalry?"

"It was after they fired the buildings, sir. I guess he thought he was defending his mother when I ordered her arrest. He was killed, of course."

Castrillon turned to Miñon. "Relieve this lieutenant from duty until I've investigated his story. Bring these prisoners to me."

He saw them with pity. Sybil was red-eyed but erect, defiant. Jacqueline copied her, chin raised proudly, eyes scornful. Camille clung to her mother; she was crying softly. Colonel Miñon came too. He disliked this interference and brought his lieutenant along to speak in his own defense.

Castrillon rose. "You are Mrs. Hodges?"

Sybil nodded.

"What happened at your hacienda, señora? I find it hard to believe that three women and a boy attacked a troop of cavalry."

"It was murder." Sybil spoke through stiff lips. "He was only thirteen. What boy wouldn't try to defend his mother?"

"Why did he think you needed defense, señora?"

"I destroyed my plantation to keep it from falling into enemy hands."

Castrillon saw her defiance, liked her better for it. "Were you threatened with reprisals?"

Jacqueline answered him. "The lieutenant grabbed her and ordered his men to tie her up."

"And that's when your brother tried to help her?"

Camille sobbed.

"They used bayonets and clubbed rifles." Sybil's voice was harsh.

"But, General, first he shot one of my men," the lieutenant interrupted.

"Quiet," Castrillon growled. "Colonel Miñon, this officer is unfit for duty." He turned to Sybil. "You were unwise, señora, but you are brave. It is too late for apologies—I cannot give you back your son. Nevertheless I regret this happened. You are no longer a prisoner. I will furnish you a carriage and an escort to carry you safely through the lines. Colonel Miñon, you will escort these ladies back to their quarters."

Miñon went straight to Santa Anna, told the story, and complained of Castrillon's hearing. "I would have done the same myself," he added stormily. "Lieutenant Pascual showed unusual restraint, Your Excellency."

"Restraint?" The president raised his brows.

"The women were unharmed. After all, they're admitted rebels, two beautiful daughters and a mother who's still young. Who could have blamed him if they'd been mistreated?"

The dictator's eyes kindled. "The women are extraordinary then?"

The watchful colonel saw the change, realized its reason. "The daughters are beauties, Your Excellency."

Santa Anna decided to investigate the case personally.

He chose the blonde the instant he entered the room. Inwardly he was smirking but he recognized the hostility here. His face was expressionless.

"You will rise," Miñon ordered, "before the President of Mexico."

"No, no, Miñon. This is no time for formality. A great injustice has been done and I've come here to express my regret." The president's smile was disarming.

"I didn't think Santa Anna would be like that," said

Camille after he left. "He's really a gentleman, isn't he?"

Santa Anna directed Miñon how to proceed. "They aren't prisoners. They must feel no restraint, but don't let them leave town. Make some excuse for keeping them here."

"Castrillon has ordered an escort for them, Your Excellency."

"I'll handle Castrillon."

The president found the general difficult. "I was disappointed in the women here until today," he began.

Castrillon only looked politely surprised.

"But now I've found a dainty dish that pleases me very much," he went on smoothly. "There were three prisoners taken at the Hodges plantation."

"I've given orders for their release, Your Excellency."

"I know. Quite right, General. They're too pretty to be caged; they deserve something different."

Still Castrillon refused to understand.

"The girl with the yellow hair appeals to me." Santa Anna was beginning to lose patience. "You'll bring her here for an interview, General. Explain the honor I am doing her."

"I'm a soldier, Your Excellency. This is out of my line."

"Good soldiers obey orders."

"Only in the line of duty, Mr. President." The retort was blunt. "I'm not your procurer."

The dictator's face darkened with anger. "When my generals defy me it's time to find others."

"I hope you find one who can win as many battles," Castrillon sturdily retorted.

Santa Anna dismissed him angrily. Damn him, he knows I need him, was his silent comment.

He finally chose Miñon as his ambassador. The colonel was more pliable. When she learned his errand Sybil refused to let Camille go.

"Don't compel me to use force. This is a command."

"Then we are still prisoners?"

Miñon changed his tune. "It is a great honor, señora, for the president to grant your daughter an interview."

"Very well, since we have no choice we will go." Sybil rose.

"You were not mentioned in the order. Only the girl was invited."

"The President of Mexico will be the first to understand that a girl of seventeen cannot make a call unchaperoned," she replied serenely.

Puzzled, Miñon escorted all three of them to headquarters.

Santa Anna had changed uniforms for this interview, wore all his glittering orders. He scowled when he saw the company.

"What's the meaning of this, Colonel? I sent you for one and you brought back three."

"My daughters do not meet men alone," Sybil maintained stoutly.

"I need no lessons from you, señora." Exasperation made him blunt. "I was paying your daughter a compliment."

"Then pay it, sir. We will all be glad to hear it."

"It is for her, not for you. It isn't every girl who has the chance to become the consort of a nation's ruler."

"Are you proposing marriage?"

"I said nothing about it."

"You have a very queer idea of compliments, Mr. President."

"Take these others away. I'll talk to the girl alone."

It was necessary to call guards to separate them.

Camille was frightened. She tried to cling to her mother until they tore her away. Shame made her scarlet; indignation clenched her teeth; terror caused her to back against the far wall. She faced him silently.

He had recovered his smile. "Do I look so dangerous then?"

She shook her head.

"Come, come, my dear. Half the beauties in Mexico would envy you this opportunity. Do you know what they call me there? The Napoleon of the West." The sunlight glinted on his row of medals. "Is it so unpleasant to know that I, who can have anyone I choose, have selected you?"

He lost patience when she didn't answer. His voice grew sharp. "I can take what I want, you know that."

"You wouldn't, not against my will!"

"You're a queer little baggage. Did you think I had you brought here just to look at?"

She raised her head then, looked at him squarely. "You're great and famous. You can have anything you want. Why do you bother with me?"

"I knew I must have you the instant I saw you." He frowned. "Is this reluctance a trick to whet my appetite? I thought you'd come to me gladly."

"Did you expect me to be proud of this?" she whispered.

"Aren't you? Plenty of women would be."

She shook her head.

He grabbed her by the shoulders, kissed her, and was infuriated when she turned her mouth away. "I'm going to have you whether you like it or not. Don't be a little fool."

When she still resisted him he tore her dress from her shoulders, laughed at her effort to shield her body with her hands.

"You'll get over that modesty in time. You may even learn to love me. Who knows?"

"I'd hate you," she said. "I'd always hate you."

His eyes narrowed. "You expected to be married someday, didn't you? Was that such a terrible thought?"

"That's different. You know that."

He laughed. "So that's what you want, some priest to make mumbo jumbo over us. Then everything would be all right, eh?"

She stared at him, astonished. "Don't you believe in marriage?"

His eyes traveled over her slowly, his want sharpened by her beauty. He didn't touch her again—the fear in her look held him back. "Am I so repulsive then?" he demanded impatiently.

She had been shrinking from the fear in her mind. His question focused her attention on him. A smile softened his face although his eyes were cold. Their austerity and his uniform, stiff with gold, reminded her of his position. Jody's death, her fears of the past forty-eight hours, the shock of his blunt proposal—all merged into a misty unreality. This suave man ruled Mexico. Her own helpless-

ness here was just a trivial part of his wide power. She was awed, a little less frightened.

She wants gentle handling, he was thinking. Damn it, where's the pleasure of taking a shivering child to bed?

The sheen of his decorations held her attention, symbols of his authority.

"All right," he decided suddenly. "You shall be married if that's what you want." He was watching, saw the stiffness of fear leave her body. Her wide eyes questioned him in wonder. "You'd like that, wouldn't you? You'd be a queen then; do you realize what that would mean?"

"Are you serious?" she managed to say.

His hold on her was gentle this time. She still held back but he sensed a difference in her resistance; it was more timid than fierce. She looked at him, trying to read his face. A jumble of thoughts blurred her mind, dizzying her with their splendor, dulling her panic.

"We will be married today," he promised.

The greatness of this man filled Camille's mind. Almost since she could remember, she had heard his name, sometimes with hope, most often with awe. First she was numbed by his offer, but the idea turned pleasant quickly and dazed her with the vastness of its possibilities. Her terror faded; only a little fringe of it remained to tighten the edges of her nerves, sharpen her sensation when he kissed her again. She caught her breath and tried to hide her quivering response.

He was delighted with that. Warmth was natural to her. When he sensed that, he forgot his gentleness. and was reminded of it by her gasp when his caress became more intimate. She backed away. clutching at her dress. "We're not married yet, Your Excellency."

He laughed. "That's not the language of a bride. Call me Antonio."

His whim pleased him. This was very simple after all. Why not, if a brief ceremony would turn a reluctant maiden into a willing bride? Thought of his wife in Mexico didn't trouble him. She was far away. As for the law—he was Santa Anna; he was the law. He promised her that her mother should attend the wedding. She wanted that. An

aide was sent in search of Camille's baggage; she must be dressed suitably. He called for Colonel Miñon.

"Fetch me the priest, Colonel. I'm going to be married."

Father Refugio de la Garza refused to perform the ceremony. "You are already married, Your Excellency."

"You forget who I am. I will get a divorce."

"Not in the sight of the Church, Your Excellency."

"It would be a simple thing for me to order a rebellious priest before a firing squad. Don't forget that."

"That still wouldn't change the laws of the Church."

Baffled, Santa Anna sent for the alcalde. He would have a civil marriage. Francisco Ruiz arrived promptly. His refusal was as stout as Father Refugio's.

"You're no damned churchman. You're a civil officer; you take your authority from me."

"Legal authority, Your Excellency. I can act only within the law. This is outside of it."

"In Mexico I make the law," the dictator roared. He had Ruiz arrested.

This unexpected opposition inflamed Santa Anna. Colonel Miñon quieted the storm. "We can borrow a robe, Your Excellency. The ritual is printed in a book. I'll find someone to perform the rite for you. I've a sly rogue in my regiment, just the fellow we need. He could do it."

"Eh? You think it could be fixed?"

"I'm sure of it."

Santa Anna laughed. "I'm afraid I've not appreciated your resourcefulness, Miñon. Why not? God knows I tried to get a regular priest for the job. This rascal of yours, can he keep his mouth shut?"

"A handful of gold will do that, Your Excellency. If not, there are other ways."

Sybil and Jacqueline were held in the home of Francisco Ruiz. Ostensibly, they were free to come and go as they pleased although there was a sentry at the door, because the alcalde was confined there. He told them why. It added to Sybil's strain and yet she saw hope in it.

"Surely, Father Refugio can't be forced to perform such a ceremony against his will," she said.

"Of course not. Santa Anna already has a wife."

She hadn't known that. "Then what is this talk of marriage?"

"Perhaps it is his way of cajoling a child." Ruiz made a wry mouth as if the words tasted bitter. "You must tell your daughter the truth when you see her, señora."

"Camille won't be taken in by such tricks." Sybil's voice sounded confident; inwardly she wasn't so sure. She remembered her daughter's willfulness as a child, the suddenness with which she slipped from one mood to another. She had been half dazzled by Santa Anna from the first, impressed by his magnificence and his manner. "He isn't to blame," Camille had said when reminded that these were Jody's murderers. Sybil's uneasiness grew, the more she thought of it.

Camille might prove easy to tempt if a wedding to the "little Napoleon" were dangled before her eyes.

She sent for the priest. Ruiz couldn't go himself. His thirteen-year-old son Pancho was her messenger.

"General Castrillon is a good man." She explained her hope. "If we can reach him I think he will help us."

"I will go myself," Father Refugio told her.

Castrillon did his best. He went directly to the president's headquarters, but when Santa Anna learned his errand he turned away angrily.

"You forget your position, Castrillon."

"I am reminding you of yours, sir."

"Then save yourself this trouble. I know my position well enough and yours too. Good God, there are times when I think I should have made you a bishop instead of a general!"

He dismissed Castrillon abruptly.

Two things kept the women indoors. Sybil hoped for another summons from Santa Anna, feared to miss it. She wanted desperately another opportunity to see Camille again. Also, the streets were unsafe for Anglo-Saxon women. Jacqueline had ventured out once. Fortunately young Pancho Ruiz was with her. He had promised to show her the damage wrought by the Alamo cannon. "Just one shot

wrecked the president's headquarters," he said, and grimaced. "Too bad he wasn't there."

Pancho was proud of his role as guide. Together they slipped from the house. They had gone only a hundred yards when a soldier stopped them.

"What's this—a *Yanqui* woman?" Stout fingers closed around Jacqueline's wrist as he turned her for closer inspection.

She tried to pull free and failed.

"And timid too, eh? Don't be frightened, little one. I'm very gentle as long as you don't cross me."

A ring of curious soldiers had gathered, attracted by the scene. They found his reference to gentleness amusing. It started a chorus of laughter. He liked that, and stared owlishly around for approval.

That was when Jacqueline wrenched free, tried to dart away. Her path was blocked by the crowd. This time he caught her by the dress, pulled her back into his arms. When she tried to twist away, he only laughed and held her closer.

Pancho tried to interfere, tugging at the soldier's arm until a shove sent him sprawling. "Run away, *muchacho*. This is a game for men."

Pancho picked himself up from the dust, his wits racing. He rejected the impulse to fling himself on his antagonist. That wouldn't help, and the crowd was swelling. The physical odds were beyond him. He started to laugh shrilly, his voice rising until he was slyly sure of their attention.

"What's so funny?"

"Maybe he landed on his head," someone suggested. "He doesn't sound very bright."

"Oh-ho!" Pancho crowed. "So you think I am the crazy one, and yet you maul the mistress of the president." His laughter mounted again. "Wait till Santa Anna hears of this. Then you'll know which of us is weak in the head."

The crowd muttered uneasily, glanced at Jacqueline still gripped in her tormentor's embrace. He was uncertain, too, still he didn't release her. "He's lying. Does he think I'll give up my pretty wench so easy?"

"Oh, yes, I'm lying." Pancho's laughter turned to taunts.

"You know Santa Anna. Do you think he'd pass up a baggage as pretty as this? Go on, take her. Pay no attention to me. And when the president hears what happened it will be my turn to laugh again."

Reluctantly the soldier loosed his grip. "Go on," he said, and gave Jacqueline a shove. "The brat is telling the truth. You aren't worth the lashing I would get."

She stumbled through the crowd. Once clear of it she ran, with Pancho at her heels, until the house was reached. Her face was still scarlet when she turned on the boy. "I could shake you."

"It was the only way, Jacqueline. How else could I have freed you?"

"But they believed it!"

The incident tightened the friendship between them. Her admiration for Pancho grew when she learned that he had been through the lines to the Alamo twice since the siege began.

"I was my father's messenger," he explained, and, embarrassed by her regard, he added, "It wasn't too hard. Many messengers go in and out from there all the time.

"They are Texians," he went on, "used to the frontier, and they know all its tricks, while these soldiers are conscripts and come from the cities. We know how to follow a trail in the night and they don't. They are dull, these soldiers, when it comes to woodcraft."

Later this conversation kept recurring to Jacqueline's mind as her despair over Camille grew. In the Alamo, just a few hundred yards away, was Mars Kirk. Jim Bowie was there, too, and his *Leoncitos*. If only she could reach them they would know what to do. She intended first to ask Pancho to go. What he had accomplished once, he could repeat. When she looked at him she thought of Jody. He was much the same size. She remembered, too, the ease with which her tormentor had flung him aside. He was only a child; she couldn't ask it of him.

She questioned him closely about those trips, and tried to memorize their details, until her constant probing stirred his suspicion.

"What are you planning?" he asked sharply. "This is no job for women."

"I must go, Pancho. I'm thinking of my sister now. We need help."

"I will do it for you."

She shook her head. "It's my plan. I will do it myself."

"But a girl can't venture out. You saw what happened before."

"I've thought of that. I will dress as a boy. You can help me."

They planned it together. She swore him to secrecy, realizing her mother would oppose the scheme and yet, now that she had made her decision, she felt sure it was her only course. She was certain of Mars's co-operation. He might lack authority but he was close to Bowie. She relied on that. Jim Bowie could accomplish anything. Her old confidence in him still was unbounded. Pancho's clothes were too small for her. He borrowed a suit of his father's. He was to accompany her at the start and set her on the path before turning back.

It lacked an hour of midnight when they slipped stealthily from the house. They headed west at first, away from their destination. "They aren't so alert on this side of town," Pancho explained. The boy knew each sentry post and they crept around them silently.

Once clear of the town they walked boldly, turned south along the banks of Alazan Creek for a mile before heading eastward, to circle the town.

It was the path Pancho had followed before. Just south of the Alamo at La Villita was Santa Anna's strongest battery; a thousand yards farther east, at the old Powder House, was another entrenched position. Between them stretched open prairie, almost flat, guarded only by cavalry patrols. This was their route. They skirted La Villita safely, turned north, crawling cautiously. Once cavalry passed near. They crouched by a bush, grateful for the night, as the horsemen rode carelessly by. The creak of saddle leather and low mumble of conversation sounded dangerously close.

Here they parted. Having come so far Pancho wanted to

go on, but Jacqueline wouldn't hear of it. "If we both disappear they won't know what happened to us," she whispered. "Mother will be frantic and so will your people. You must go back and tell them where I am. Tell Mother not to worry. I'm all right." This persuaded him.

There was an *acequia* a hundred yards ahead, and this was her goal. It flowed along the east wall of the Alamo, then changed its course to rejoin the river at La Villita. Once the safety of its bank was reached, she would be midway between the lines, most of her danger behind her. The canal would shelter her almost to the Alamo gate. There were trees along the water. By straining her eyes she could see them, blacker shadows against the night. She set her course by these, stepped softly forward. She had covered only half the distance when she heard horsemen coming. There was no underbrush here in which she might take cover.

She stretched out on the ground, buried her face in her arms so its whiteness wouldn't betray her, and waited.

# 26

## *In the Alamo*

SANTA ANNA had tightened his lines about the Alamo but messengers continued to get through. Cavalry circled the fort on the east; a strong entrenchment was built to the northeast to repel another attack where the peach orchard had been. During the fifth day of the siege the *acequia* which watered the garrison was dammed to a muddy trickle. Mars and Jess joined the volunteers who were sent out that night to destroy the obstruction and renew the flow of water. Sixty men went in the party. Near the fort's northeast corner the wall was damaged and a trench mounting a cannon had been built here to reinforce the line. They slipped out at this point, crawled single file along the path to the narrow ditch, hugging its cover, waiting for a challenge which didn't come until they'd gone nearly a mile. There was a brisk battle then.

"Stick close to me, Mars," Jess suggested. "It's a long way back. This fight's jest begun."

The dam had been built near the old mill where the *acequia* drained from the river. This was familiar territory. Burleson had camped here during the siege of the town. These were the tactics of Indian fighting and they understood them well, creeping forward stealthily, firing at the blaze of each rifle, flanking enemy strong points, charging occasionally when necessary.

The attack caught the enemy off guard. The volunteers won through to the mill and destroyed the dam but the way back was just as hazardous. Reinforcements had been thrown across their path and they had to fight their way through. The blackness was friendly. They knew the ground, the enemy didn't. Travis opened up a bombardment to cover their retirement, threatening an attack toward La Villita to the south. When they finally regained the walls

the water was flowing clearly again. Every skin and tub in the Alamo was quickly filled.

"They'll try it again," Travis said. "Hoard every drop of water you can. We'll have to make it last through the day, attack at night."

The first week of the siege dragged by with little change. Once Crockett saw Santa Anna himself inspecting the La Villita trenches. "Sure that's him?"

"I'd know him anywhere," Seguin replied.

"It's a long range but I think Old Betsy can reach him," the Tennessean drawled. "She's got a p'is'nous bite, this old gal has." He steadied the long rifle against the parapet and took aim carefully. The bullet kicked up dust on the trench just below Santa Anna's shoulder. He vanished instantly.

Crockett lost his good humor for a time. " 'Twarn't Old Betsy's fault," he explained. "I just unguessed the distance." He fumed about it all day.

There was another attack, this time to the west, where a few *jacals* obstructed their fire on an enemy trench along the river's bank. They intended to destroy these buildings but the enemy was alert and a bitter struggle developed. Travis had sent ten volunteers for the task and was watching from the wall. It was too dark to see but the volleys told their own story. He went to the rescue with thirty men, stormed the trench and held it while the shacks were fired. There was an enemy six-pounder mounted here and they rolled it into the river before retreating.

Santa Anna had another narrow escape. Castrillon wanted to move a battery to the west bank of the river where a row of stone houses would mask it. He took the president there to reconnoiter and they were seen by Texas marksmen who spattered some rifle balls about them before they found cover.

Trenches covered the main approaches of the Alamo now. Each night they were moved closer. Santa Anna's bombardment continued from dawn to dusk without letup. The thick walls resisted this cannonade well. They turned a six-pound missile aside harmlessly. Some heavier guns were placed to

the north, however, and these were damaging the wall there, already partly ruined. Travis kept his garrison working furiously at night, buttressing battered spots with earth. A deep trench was dug at the weak point near the northeast corner, strengthened with logs and stone debris. Two cannon were used there to bolster the position.

Messengers had brought word that Fannin would come. The garrison was in good spirits. "He'll be here by Sunday," Travis promised cheerfully.

Bowie's quarters were in the low stone building that flanked the main gate. He was no better. The coughing grew worse and he was feverish now. Sam had rigged a tilted bed for him with the tick from his cot. Most of these rooms had windows opening only into the plaza, their exterior walls blank for safety. On each side of the old gate, however, there was a narrow port through which small brass cannon once had pointed, and Jim had one of these rooms. With his cot thus tilted, he could peer through the narrow slit of the window at the enemy entrenchments.

"I want to see what's going on," he explained. "Besides, I don't cough as much this way." He spent hours like this, his primed pistols in his lap.

Mars visited him when possible. "It won't be so bad when Fannin gets here," he said. "Then we'll have enough men to go around. We'll get some sleep occasionally. They haven't hurt us yet, they're just wearing us down. We can hold out here forever once we get enough men."

"He's got to come," Bowie would say. He'd repeat it many times in a day, it was almost a prayer. "Fannin's got to come."

Travis had sent a girl to help nurse him, Candelaria, one of the Mexican refugees. She and the black boy did their best to make him comfortable, but when they tried to move him from his post at the window he objected. "Fannin will have to come this way," he always replied.

The Texians used their guns sparingly. "Load 'em with grape," Bowie advised. "Save every ounce of ammunition for the attack. Sooner or later they'll charge, and then let 'em have it." A few times each day one of the guns roared,

when the enemy grew too bold or a target was inviting. On Sunday they checked the priming of every piece.

"We'll need a diversion to help Fannin in," Bowie suggested, and Travis agreed.

They expected relief to come from the southeast and planned to bombard the Villita trenches, then charge them to clear a path for their friends. Only a skeleton crew guarded the other fortifications that day; every man who could be spared was held in readiness for the attack along the south wall. Nothing happened. The enemy bombardment continued but there was no sound of a relief expedition.

The garrison was less confident that night.

"Fannin must know our plight. What's keeping him?" Travis asked. "Do you suppose our messengers aren't getting through?"

"I'll give you some who will," Bowie promised.

He selected three of his best men for the task, Juan Seguin, his nephew Miguel Flores, and Antonio Cruz Oroche. "I'm sending all of you," he said, "because at least one must get to Fannin. Understand? Nothing must stop you. Tell him how things are with us. There isn't a man here who's had more than an hour's sleep in a week. Make him understand we have to hold this place, Juan, if we don't want Santa Anna to carry the war to the settlements. He sent word back by Bonham that he had more than four hundred men. With a force like that to help us we can hold out here till doomsday. But we won't have to. All we need to do is to give Houston time to rally an army. I'm depending on you, Juan. Make him understand."

"We'll get through, Jaime," Seguin promised. They slipped away just before dawn the next morning.

It was a leap year and this was Monday, February twenty-ninth. "An extry day," Crockett remarked. "Even the calendar's helpin' us, boys. All we're fightin' for is a little time and here we get a whole day, free gratis."

The *acequia* was dammed again that day. Travis knew from experience that Santa Anna entrenched each position once it was attacked. "Looks like a trap," he told Bowie.

"He's probably waiting for us to storm it as we did before. But we must have water."

"Outsmart him," Jim advised. "Send half a dozen men roundabout to cut the dam from behind while you make a fake sortie from the front. If they're up to tricks we know more than they do."

He selected Jess Leeman for the job; it called for a crafty Indian fighter. With him went Mars and four of the *Leoncitos*. They slipped out at midnight by the stockade gate and followed the path the messengers took, northward along the *acequia* until they were well beyond the enemy lines. Travis gave them an hour to get into position, then he opened up a bombardment with his northern cannon. For twenty minutes he peppered the enemy entrenchments in preparation, then made a feint as if to storm them. Unlike previous attacks this was noisy. He had thirty men with him; they yelled and discharged their weapons as they came over the wall.

"He's makin' a powerful fuss," Jess commented as he and his companions tore the dam apart. "I reckon ol' Santy Anny's expectin' 'em to traipse into his trap."

There wasn't even a sentry on duty at the dam. They slipped away unseen, their task completed. Travis hadn't lost a man in the maneuver and the water was flowing again.

They were elated over this. Still more gratifying was the return of two of their messengers with reinforcements.

"Don't shoot, boys. It's me, John Smith." The scout emerged from the shadows outside the palisade gate. "I've brought some help with me." With him was Captain Albert Martin, who'd been sent in search of volunteers. The company was thirty-two strong; every man left in Gonzales able to carry a rifle had come. It was a small band but it looked big to this little garrison.

Travis marched them past each post for all his men to see. "This will happen all over Texas as soon as they get the word," he promised. "We'll have a man-size army here before you know it."

Not thirty minutes later a third messenger, Ben Highsmith, returned. He came direct from Fannin. "He's prom-

ised to come," he told them. "He has four hundred and twenty-one men."

"With what came in tonight that'll give us better than six hundred." Bowie was hopeful. "We've done it, Travis. We've held them off till our forces had time to gather. They'll never take us now."

There had been no messengers from the town for several days, since Santa Anna had tightened the siege lines. Highsmith brought news, however. Fannin was still in touch with San Antonio.

"They're waiting for some big siege guns, he says," the courier reported.

"Did he say anything about Mrs. Hodges and her daughters?" Mars crowded in to ask.

"Not a word."

By careful watching the garrison had located Santa Anna's headquarters. They were jubilant that day and decided to celebrate by shelling it. "I don't know a better way," said Green Jameson, who trained the guns himself. "Here's a salute for their little dictator." They'd chosen two twelve-pounders for the task. The first shot went wide but the second was a square hit, crashing into the wall of Santa Anna's office. The men cheered; they were in an exuberant mood.

Two more days dragged by without word of Fannin. The enemy trenches, advanced each night, were closer now, the guns hammered without letup. In spite of the Texians' fire Santa Anna succeeded in erecting a battery to command the breached wall on the north within pistol shot of the walls. Colonel Bonham arrived back from his second trip to Fannin on March third, the tenth day of the siege. It was broad daylight when he emerged from the *acequia* and sprinted for the gate. He had escaped capture by a Mexican cavalry patrol earlier, hid in a thicket along Salado Creek after a running fight and finally crawled through the lines. Daylight caught him in the ditch; it was too late to turn back and he had crawled on through. His message was for Bowie and Travis alone.

Fannin wasn't coming. He had started, held a council of

war when a wagon broke down, finally decided against the venture. The two commanders listened in silence.

"That's that," Bowie finally said.

In the doorway the sun cut a bright path through the motes of dust suspended there. Travis fixed his eyes on that, his face inscrutable. He didn't want his thoughts read just now. "I guess General Houston is our only chance. I wish I knew where he is and what he's doing."

"We might cut our way out," Bonham suggested.

Travis shook his head. "We have twenty men still in the hospital, unable to move. There are twice that many women and children. We can't leave them behind." He turned to Bowie. "What do you think, Colonel?"

"I think just what you're thinking. Maybe there's one chance in a thousand that we'll get help now. I doubt it. But we can't give up. Every day, every hour that we fight here gives our army time to rally." He was interrupted by a spasm of coughing. "We aren't whipped yet. They still have to come and take us. Remember that."

Travis turned his face outward again, watched his garrison as it moved about its duties. "There never were such men," he said. "These are the best troops that ever walked."

"If we only had enough of 'em," Bowie replied quietly.

Three more messengers were sent out that night, Ben Highsmith, John Smith and Jim Allen. They left at intervals, Allen being the last to go. "We'll keep trying," Travis said. "Get us help if you can. We'll still hold the Alamo if you can round up enough men to defend the walls." He gave them a final word of caution. "As long as we're here I'll fire a gun every morning at dawn. Don't come in unless you hear it or you may walk into a trap. That will be my signal that we're still holding out."

Again the water supply had been choked off. Travis tried to repeat his last maneuver, but when Jess's band reached the dam they found it strongly defended. The feint attack hadn't worked. There were six scouts in the group and they attacked without hesitation; the garrison was depending on them for water. There was a strong enemy picket here. The Texians fired first, then charged with clubbed weapons and

Bowie knives. Jess had detailed two men to cut the dam while the others held it. They succeeded only partially this time, the water flowed for an hour, and then was cut off again. Their work had been too hasty.

Santa Anna's guns, yards nearer each morning, didn't stop their pounding for two days. Inside the walls the din was so terrific men had to shout to make themselves heard.

When Jacqueline started her desperate journey, it had been easy for her to slip undetected from the Ruiz house because of her mother's absence.

Santa Anna sent an officer for Sybil. She had been waiting for this. She trudged at her escort's side, her mind seething with the things she would say. She had rehearsed them so often that they were convincing to her. She had no thought of failure until she saw Camille.

She blinked when she stepped from the dark into the lighted room.

Camille was wearing her white brocade. Sybil found herself remembering when she'd bought the material, and wondered that she should recall such a detail now. Camille, smiling, looked expectantly at her. This didn't fit the picture that had troubled her.

Or did it? She remembered her doubt of Camille, and her eyes turned to Santa Anna who stood across the room.

"You're just in time, Mama."

"For what?"

"I'm going to be married. Of course I wanted you at my wedding." The words were bright.

Sybil froze in the doorway. For a moment she was silent. "Santa Anna is already married, child. There can be no wedding."

Camille turned, stared at the president in bewilderment.

"Nonsense." He shrugged. "The priest is waiting. We are going to be married tonight."

"You are married," Sybil insisted flatly.

"You hear, Mama? He says the wedding will be tonight."

"Which of us will you believe, Camille? Have I ever lied to you? I tell you he already has a wife."

"I've been married," Santa Anna conceded. The impatient wave of his arm seemed to brush the past aside. "What does that matter now? Camille will be my bride."

"I won't permit it." Sybil's voice was brittle.

"You can't stop it," he replied. He stepped to Camille's side and put his arm around her. She had been bewildered, uncertain before. His gesture seemed to reassure her. She smiled at him.

It infuriated Sybil. "You don't know what you are doing, Camille. These are the people who murdered your brother."

"Not Santa Anna, Mama. Must we go over all that again? He has punished the officer who did that."

"Camille, listen to me. This man is the butcher of Zacatecas. He's here to fight your own people. Have you lost your mind?"

"Try to understand, Mama. We love each other."

"Love!" Sybil's rage was in her blazing eyes. It made her voice rasp. "There's another word for taking a girl to bed like a common strumpet."

"Shut up," snapped Santa Anna.

"You can't do this. You can't." Sybil was pleading now. She tried to clutch Camille, was fended roughly off by the president.

"Take her out," he ordered the waiting aide.

Camille had backed away from her mother, resentful of the scene. When she saw the officer seize her by the shoulder and drag her toward the door, she relented and tried again for understanding. "Please don't," she said.

Even in this stress it gave her a sense of power when, at her words, Sybil was released. It strengthened her resolution, too. Her mother's accusation had shaken her confidence; Santa Anna's assurance had not quite restored it. This quick obedience accomplished that.

"I want you at my wedding, Mama." She consciously tried to make her voice sound reasonable.

Sybil stared at her wordlessly. Her misery was in her face.

"Do you realize what this means?" Once started, Camille wanted to go on until she had justified herself. "What girl

wouldn't be proud to be the wife of Santa Anna? Why can't you be reasonable? Remember, he's the ruler of a great country. It will mean a lot to you and Jacqueline, too."

Still Sybil was silent. Camille grew resentful then. "I thought you'd be glad," she flared. "Would you rather see me his—his mistress? I thought you loved me."

"Oh, Camille! Camille!" Sybil took a step forward.

"No, don't touch me if that's how you feel. I was doing this as much for you as for me. I wanted to help you, too."

"We don't want that kind of help. We'll find a way out of this. We must. Trust me, child, and give me time."

"Time! Time! What for? Why don't you think of me—consider my side of this?"

"I've thought of nothing else since I heard it," was the bitter reply.

"Enough of this." Santa Anna was thoroughly angry now. "If you stay for the wedding, you'll have to keep your mouth shut."

"Give us time to talk this over," Sybil pleaded.

"You've wasted time enough already. The priest is waiting." He put his arm around Camille's shoulders.

His possessiveness angered Sybil. She tried to tear them apart and again he ordered his aide to interfere. "Take her away and lock her up until she comes to her senses," he ordered.

Camille would have delayed then had she known a way. "Let me talk to Mama again," she begged. "I'll make her understand. I want her here when I'm married."

He didn't release his hold on her. "She'll understand quick enough. I won't be put off any longer."

Colonel Miñon had fetched two rascals. Ignacio Martinez wore a borrowed robe. Sergeant Juan Becerra had been brought along as a witness. It all seemed very formal to Camille except that Santa Anna kept his arm about her shoulders during the ceremony, held her tight.

She was a little frightened when they were alone. He led her at once to the bedroom, was impatient at her delay and unfastened her dress himself. After all, I'm his wife now, she tried to reassure herself. I'm the first lady of Mexico.

# 27

## *Through the Lines*

THE two cavalrymen passed so close that one of their horses shied at Jacqueline's motionless figure. She hugged the ground. That magnified the sound of the hoofs. To her it seemed she would be trampled, and she resisted an impulse to scramble to her feet and run. That way capture was inevitable; her best chance was to lie still.

They were so near she could smell the strong sweat of the animals. The thump of hoofs was in her ears now. Her body trembled, she clenched her teeth.

A horse snorted its fright. The ordered rhythm of its canter broke. Its rider swore as the quick whirl nearly unseated him.

"What is it?"

To Jacqueline the gruff voice seemed right above her.

"Probably a snake. Someday this brute's going to throw me when he swerves like that."

The voices receded and were quickly muffled in the beat of hoofs.

The night was chill. Jacqueline was surprised to discover her shirt wet with perspiration when she resumed her stealthy progress. The inky shadows along the *acequia* were close now. She scurried across the few remaining yards, tumbled down the grassy slope with a sigh of relief. These banks seemed friendly, shut out the fear which had been following her. She stood erect now, walked boldly. She was almost in the Alamo's shadow here; an enemy patrol would scarcely venture so close.

Pancho had instructed her carefully. Where the ditch turned north she would be at the corner of the mission church. It was only a few yards along this wall to the palisade gate, and safety. She identified the bend easily. A few yards away, beyond those high walls, were her friends. All

her concern was on the enemy behind her; she had no thought of danger ahead. She stepped more eagerly now, caution forgotten. The stream was narrow. She intended to jump it but her foot slipped in the mud. She tried to catch herself, failed, skidded into the water and sat down with a splash that sounded like a pistol shot in this alert hush. Almost instantly this was echoed by the sharp blast of two rifles from above. She heard the whine of their bullets perilously close.

She knew better than to stir. Any movement would draw more fire until she was identified. She sat motionless in the chill water. "Don't shoot," she called. "I'm a friend."

"I'll be damned!" The voice seemed right above her. "Lucky thing it was dark or I might have killed a girl."

"Are you by yourself?" someone else called.

"Yes."

"Come in along the wall, and quietly. Any more fuss and we're apt to draw enemy fire."

"I have a message for Colonel Bowie," she told them, as soon as she reached safety.

Crockett was in command at the gate. He surveyed her with obvious astonishment. "We're gettin' powerful shorthanded when we start usin' gals for this business," he commented. "Better change clothes fust."

She shook her head. "This is urgent."

He led the way to Bowie's room, left them alone.

At first Jim didn't recognize the bedraggled, shivering girl. *Acequia* mud was plastered across one cheek. The ill-fitting trousers clung to her legs and squashed as she moved. It was hard, too. for her to realize this was Jim Bowie. His eyes glittered with fever; his cheekbones stood out sharply in a sunken face. He was propped in the tilted bed which made his rest easier.

"First, get out of those wet clothes. You'll catch cold, child."

When she glanced uncertainly around, he understood her embarrassment. There was little possibility for privacy in this cell-like room. Its only door opened on the plaza. He nodded toward his own clothing folded on a chest. There

was an extra blanket thrown back at the foot of his bed. He indicated this too. "I'd leave you alone here if I could, but I'm a sick man. Hang that blanket over the head of the bed and dress behind it."

He recognized her when she bent to pick up the folded clothes. "Jacqueline!"

She straightened up. "Then you remember me?"

"Of course. How in the world did you get here? Never mind, don't tell me until you've changed your clothes."

He didn't wait though. His questioning began while she was busy changing. He heard her laugh. "What's the matter?"

"This shirt—it's big enough for a nightgown."

He waited a second, hoped she'd laugh again. He'd never heard her laugh before. When she didn't, he began his questions. It wasn't the answers that interested him so much as just hearing her voice.

"How's your mother?"

"She's all right. That is, she's well, but we're terribly worried."

"I heard about the burning of your plantation. How did it happen?"

"Mother did it. When the enemy came she was determined our crops shouldn't feed them."

"You mean—she set fire to it herself?"

"Two of our old-time Negroes helped fire the barns. I helped at the house, but it was Mother's idea. She planned everything—told us what to do."

He was silent then. So it was Sybil herself who set the torch to her possessions! It didn't fit his memory of her. I was wrong about her, he thought. I've been wrong about so many things.

She was dressed now; his clothing muffled her figure and made her look frail. "Better put that blanket around you until you get warm," he advised.

Mud still smudged her cheek. He wiped it off himself with a corner of the blanket while she leaned, laughing, over the bed. The little service pleased him. My daughter, he thought, and this is the first time I've ever touched her.

Because of the tenderness he felt, his next question was gruff. "How in the world did you get here?"

"I came through the lines tonight. It wasn't hard."

"But why? What was your mother thinking of?"

"She didn't know. I had to see you. We're in trouble and there was no place else to turn."

"What kind of trouble?"

She told him of Camille. "I thought you would know what to do," she added simply.

He groaned. What could he do? He had never been so conscious of helplessness before. His mind raced over each detail of the situation, rehearsed the overwhelming odds. His own weakness added to his confusion, and yet, through it all, one thought stood out. Jacqueline had come to him. His daughter had sought his help. She stood here now, waiting. He must not fail her.

His bewilderment passed. He knew what he would do if he were well. Somehow he'd find a way to accomplish it.

"Sam!" Jim bellowed for his black boy. "Sam, come here quick."

"What do you want?" Jacqueline asked.

"I'm going to get up." The servant was at the door by then. "Go fetch Mars Kirk. Bring him to me quickly. Yes, and find Jess Leeman too. Bring him."

The Negro darted out the door like a frightened squirrel. After he left Jim sat up. It made him cough. He slid to the floor, clung to the bed until the paroxysm passed. Jacqueline tried to help him but he waved her aside. "I'll have to do this myself," he said, but when he loosed his grip on the bedpost he collapsed. Jacqueline tugged at him futilely and had to call for help to get him back between blankets. Candelaria, the nurse, and one of Crockett's Tennesseans were helping her when Mars arrived. Bowie was raving weakly.

"What's wrong, Don Jaime?"

"I must get up, I must get up," Jim kept repeating. He seemed not to notice Mars's arrival at first; not until later when across the room he saw Jacqueline in his arms. He grew silent then.

Jim's thoughts were ordered by the time Jess arrived. He

insisted that Candelaria and the others leave. "I must talk to these three alone." He held Jacqueline by the wrist, keeping her at his side; his nod included Mars and Jess.

"Tell them what you told me," he urged her after the others were gone. Mars was white-faced when she finished. Jess swore softly.

"I'm going. If you hadn't stopped me I'd have gone before." Mars's voice was accusing.

Bowie closed his eyes. There was pain on his face and it was very white from his recent exertion. "I know, I know. A man makes decisions according to what he thinks is best. Then, right or wrong, he has to abide by them. You're going this time, Mars, but you aren't going alone." He pressed his forehead with his hand; it looked thin and white. "If only I could go. I wish Juan Seguin were here."

"What about me?" Jess volunteered.

"I'm already counting on you, Jess. I wished for Seguin because he knows the town so well, but you've been here a good while. You know your way."

"Two o' us is enough fer a job like this."

"Santa Anna has only five thousand men in the town now," was the wry retort.

Jacqueline listened while they laid their plans. It was three days since the last messenger had been sent out; that she had been able to get through showed that the lines still were loosely held. They thought out each step carefully, mapping it in advance. Bowie did most of the talking.

"Their trenches are so close it won't be easy," he warned. "The *acequias* can be traps if they're watching them."

"I've wondered about that," Mars said. "We've made highways of these canals and still we get through. You'd think they'd watch 'em closer."

"They're townsmen, not Injun fighters," Jess retorted. "Besides, they don't know we're usin' 'em. If they did, it might be different. I'm not worried 'bout gettin' through. Why, there war thirty-two men in the Gonzales comp'ny and they got through unseen. I sw'ar I could move this whole garrison out without Santy Anny bein' the wiser."

"Follow the little *acequia* past the peach orchard," Bowie

counseled. "From there on boldness is your best course. Their camp is so big, there's bound to be lots of movement. Remember, wits count now. Two men can't whip an army in open fight." Once clear, he suggested that they cross the river below the old mill where they had fought so hard for their water supply and enter the town from the north, following the path previously used in storming the town. "That should be the easiest part of it. They won't be expecting you there."

He rehearsed them in the layout of the town. Though they knew it fairly well, to him each turning was familiar. He could close his eyes and picture every house. "If only I could go!" he groaned once.

"Rest easy, Jim, we'll git through," Jess assured him.

"What about Jacqueline?" Mars finally asked.

"She goes."

"I won't be responsible." Jess glanced at the girl uneasily. "No offense meant, ma'am, but this is man's work."

"She goes, Jess." Jim's voice was patient. "I've thought it all out. Fannin isn't coming. There's no escape from this place."

"The women will be safe enough."

"We're planning this because her sister wasn't safe enough. She goes, I tell you, and she'll be no handicap. If she came through the lines by herself she can get out with you."

Jess nodded, reluctantly.

Bowie drew a little map for them with crosses marking the dwellings of trusted friends. "You can rely on every one of them," he promised. "Tell them why you're there and that I sent you." They memorized the names and he drilled them in it repeatedly.

Mars stayed silent. His white face mirrored his worry.

"Are you listening, son?" Bowie demanded sharply once.

"I—I was thinking of Jacqueline. We must get her out. Just the same it worries me, having her along. We're taking her straight into the enemy camp. I keep thinking of that."

"Just thinking of her isn't enough now. She'll be safe with you if this is planned right. Listen to me, Mars—" Jim

gripped him by the sleeve—"I can't go myself and I'm sending you in my place. I'm counting on you. There must be no slip-up. Don't fail me, son."

After that Mars forced himself to hear every word.

Jim drilled them on the details of his map until they were letter-perfect. After that he destroyed it. "If you were caught and they found it on you, it would get friends into trouble." It was dawn before he dismissed them.

"Take Jacqueline to Major Dickinson's wife," he suggested to Mars. "She'll find some proper clothes for her."

He turned to the girl. "Get some sleep, my dear. You'll need all the rest you can get. Of course, I'll want to see you again." That seemed to mirror his thought too accurately. "We'll need to go over these plans again before you leave," he explained.

"I'm worried about him," Jacqueline confided as Mars escorted her to the church in search of Mrs. Dickinson. "I think he has pneumonia."

"I don't know what it is. His cough is bad and he grows weaker every day. Sometimes I think it's only his will power that keeps him alive at all."

During the day the others rested for the adventure ahead. There was no sleep for Bowie. For him, Jacqueline was still in the room. He could close his eyes and see her standing by his bed, feel the cool touch of her fingers on his wrist. The doubt so long a part of him existed no more. This was his daughter. The conviction had been growing ever since he'd seen her first. He laughed once, in spite of his fears for her, when he remembered how she'd come alone through the lines.

She's a spunky youngster, he thought. I like that. It pleased him to think that there was something of him in her veins, and this was very like a Bowie.

He thought of Sybil, too, at first with a twinge of pain. He always had prided himself on justness and with her he had been less than fair. He recalled the bitterness of their recent meetings with mellowed understanding. Of course she hated me. What else could I expect after I denied the existence of my own child? Again he thought, Sybil came

to me once in New Orleans just as Jacqueline came today. That time I turned her away.

The memories weren't all bitter. The clarity with which he could recall trivial details of their times together surprised him. He remembered a long-ago afternoon on Bayou Boeuf when Sybil was at his side. Every incident of that day was etched sharply in his mind. There had been a shower that morning and the fragrance of moist earth was a tang in his nostrils. A bee had droned above them, and they had watched its flight among the dogwood blossoms. Its buzz still was in his ears and the sound of Sybil's voice, too. He recalled the look of her when her eyes were tender.

Again and again he returned to the thought that Jacqueline had come to him for help. It warmed him each time he remembered it. The feel of her skin when he brushed the mud from her cheek was an exquisite memory, too. He had longed to take her in his arms then. Why not? he wondered, and lay there tempted by the thought. She was his daughter. He had only to tell her so. She belonged to him and he had nothing else left. His need for her grew as he contemplated it.

He wondered if it were too late, and shrugged the doubt aside. His determination grew. He would tell her. She would come again that night before leaving. That would be the time. He tried to envision how she would look then, what she would say, but his imagination failed him there.

He caught his breath when she came. It was midafternoon and he hadn't expected her for hours. Mrs. Dickinson had provided her with a dress. He liked the femininity of it. This was the way he wanted to remember her. "You look very sweet, Jacqueline."

"You must be feeling better." Her smile was bright. "I don't think you ever noticed how I looked before."

"Yes, I did." This was the time to tell her. He watched her step across the room with easy grace. She has Sybil's walk, he thought, and relished each supple movement. For a few minutes she busied herself with the room, straightened its disorder. It gave him an opportunity to watch her without being observed. He liked that. Otherwise, he thought,

she might see the hunger in his eyes. Still he waited, wondered what she would do when he told her. At length she was standing by his bed. "I've something to tell you," he began.

"First let me have my say," she interrupted. "I've thought it over very carefully, Colonel Bowie. I'm not leaving here tonight."

"What's that?"

"I'm going to stay with you. You're sick. I'm needed here."

He stared at her, bewildered. He hadn't expected this. "That's out of the question," he replied slowly. "What would happen to you when this place finally fell?"

"It isn't like you to give up. We haven't lost yet."

"I haven't given up." His retort was sharp. "I simply know what's ahead." He continued more evenly, "Fannin was our last hope. Now we know he isn't coming."

She was standing beside him now, leaning against the bed, her grave eyes on his face. "Jess Leeman said he could lead this whole garrison safely through the lines if necessary."

"He might. But that isn't enough. Our job is to hold Santa Anna here as long as possible. Give Houston a chance to rally an army. We aren't through yet. Our task isn't done. We'll hang on."

She realized the finality of his decision and stood quiet. It had been hard for her to recognize the Jim Bowie she remembered in this ravaged figure. It wasn't now. The same raw courage of the legends was in the stubborn set of his jaw, peered out of his resolute eyes so that their gray glinted like steel.

She touched his flushed forehead. It was very hot.

He remembered what he wanted to tell her at the touch of her fingers. To him they felt soft and cool. Now is the time to say it, he thought. Still something held him back.

"There are other women here," Jacqueline said then. "Is there any reason I should leave while they remain behind?"

"They aren't named Hodges," he explained. "They'll be in no danger, but if Santa Anna has Camille snatched away from him he won't treat her sister gently should she fall into

his hands. No, I must get you out of here, Jacqueline. You see, I've considered this carefully."

"How about you? You're thinking of everyone but yourself."

He smiled at her. "You'd be surprised how much I've thought about myself today, my dear. I've thought of nothing else." His course suddenly had become clear. His yearning for her was greater than ever, but there was a new lucidity in his mind. She is thinking of me; I'm thinking only of what I want, he told himself. He wanted her to know him as a father, to hold her in his arms, in an hour to make up for all the wasted time he had lost. It was too late. He could only buy that happiness at the cost of her own peace. How would she welcome such knowledge? he wondered. Can I expect her to share my gladness? In his mind no taint was attached to her birth. She was the fruit of a love that had been young and tender and generous. There had been nothing furtive or shoddy between him and Sybil. Once his anger had tarnished it, had turned honesty and rapture into a soiled memory. That was ended now. But how can I expect her to understand that when it has taken me so long to discover it? He knew he couldn't bear to face her if he read shame in her eyes.

And even if she understood, he thought, it would just make the parting harder. She might even refuse to leave. He clung to that idea. Yes, then she'd refuse to leave. It helped him stouten his resolution.

"Still I'd like to stay with you," she insisted. "I could use another name. If the worst came to the worst, Santa Anna need not know I'm Camille's sister."

"He's seen you, Jacqueline. He can't forget you that easily. No man could. Just the same, you've pleased me very much. You're as generous as I'd hoped you'd be."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Don't try. I'm like that too. There have been so many things I haven't understood in my life. Now, when I really know the answers, it is too late to do anything about it."

She sat with him until evening. There was so little she could do and he seemed to take comfort from her presence.

Often, she was conscious of his eyes staring at her. There was such tenderness in them, it embarrassed her a little. Then she would look away. She hadn't realized Jim Bowie was such a gentle man.

Bowie rehearsed them in their plan again that night. Travis was present too. Jim had sent for him and explained the necessity of the action.

"I doubt if they can get through now." The colonel looked worried. "The lines are mighty close."

"We have to," replied Mars.

"I wish Seguin were here," Travis said then. "He knows this country better than anyone and he is a great scout."

Bowie smiled. "I never thought I'd hear you admit it."

Travis took his hand. "I've learned a lot in the past few days. One thing is that a man's loyalty and his courage don't depend on the tongue he speaks. I wonder if I've learned that too late."

"No," said Bowie. "I reckon it's never too late for understanding." He closed his eyes a moment. "One thing I have always realized, Travis: nobody needed to teach you how to fight. I'm glad we know each other better."

This twelfth day of the siege the enemy fire had slackened. For days the bombardment had been furious; now the guns spoke seldom. Travis was worried by it. "What do you think it means?" he asked Bowie.

"I've no idea. I'd rather have 'em firing. It would keep the men awake. Twelve days without rest has worn them down. If it keeps on slackening off, we'll have a lot of sleeping men on our hands. I don't like the quiet."

The venture through the lines was planned for ten o'clock. Bowie preferred a later hour when sentries might be less vigilant, but there was much to accomplish before dawn. The extra time might be needed in Camille's rescue. There was no point in going over the plan again. Each knew its details by heart now.

"I'm counting on you, Jess." Bowie grasped the scout's hand when they parted. "You can get through if any man can."

"Don't worry, Jim. We'll make it."

He was almost as brief with Mars. "Keep your wits about you," he said as they gripped hands. "I know how you feel. You're all torn up inside over the responsibility of Jacqueline. Mind what I told you once before: dying for her isn't enough. A foolish man can do that. It's living for her, winning through, taking her out to safety that counts now."

"I know." Mars's face was grimly set.

Bowie clung to his arm. "I hate to send a man where I can't go myself."

"We understand that. You'd come if you were able to crawl."

He parted from Jacqueline last, held her back for a word, while the others waited outside. He looked long at her. She was dressed as a boy again, in clothes that Mars had found. They fitted her better than his had done. She looked very fragile standing there. There were many things he wished to tell her. He was afraid to start for fear he couldn't stop. He held out his hand. "Good luck." His voice sounded almost gruff. "Good luck always, Jacqueline."

"Don't worry about us. You've thought of everything in advance. I knew if I just could reach you everything would be all right." She hesitated. "How can I ever thank you?"

"I'd like to send your mother a message," he said then. "Just tell her—" he groped for a way to phrase it that wouldn't be too revealing—"tell her I wanted to come myself. And Jacqueline, please tell her that I understand."

"I'll tell her." Jacqueline stooped and kissed his forehead before she left the room.

After they were gone Bowie had Sam and Candelaria prop his cot nearer the narrow window so he could stare out toward the enemy lines. Their fire, slowing all day, had stopped completely now. The new stillness seemed unnatural but he was grateful for it. He could strain his ears against the night, listen for the distant challenge which would tell him that his friends were trapped. He waited there hour by hour, listening.

# 28

## *The Assault*

THE *acequia* was a familiar path to Jess; they had followed it out on two of their raids to cut the dam. He led the way, Jacqueline at his heels, Mars in the rear. The silence annoyed them. Their progress had to be more cautious. They had advanced only two hundred yards when they were held up for half an hour by the movement of enemy troops. Hundreds of men were stumbling past them in the blackness. They crouched in the water, submerged to their necks, and waited until the last straggler had passed.

"What does that mean?" Jacqueline whispered.

Jess saved his answer, merely guided her by a squeeze of the arm as he moved on again. They were behind the enemy lines now so they followed Jim's suggestion and walked more boldly. "There'll be plenty of movement back there," he had advised. "Caution would betray you if you were seen. They won't think twice about a party that isn't trying to hide."

Twice more they encountered moving columns. "Where do you suppose they're all going?" It was Mars who asked this time. "There is something afoot."

There was less need for silence here and Jess replied, "If it's what I think, th'ar goin' to miss us in the Alamo by mornin'." His voice was grim. "Those look like stormin' parties to me. Makes me wish we hadn't left."

"We have our job cut out for us."

"Yeah, I know, but thar'll be need of ev'ry rifle in the Alamo too."

Once the marching troops were passed their progress was rapid. "We won't be noticed," Jess said. "Thar's too much goin' on." They followed the main *acequia* into town from the north, the way Seguin had led them once. The streets were deserted; they met no sentries. "It's like I told you,"

Jess said. "They've moved ev'ry man across the river. Thar's goin' to be fightin' come sunrise."

They went straight to the Ruiz house, where they expected to find Sybil. No one answered their knock, and when they tried the door they found it unbolted.

They stepped in, felt safer off the street.

They couldn't find a candle. Jacqueline was at home here. She groped her way to her mother's room in darkness but the bed was empty. She took alarm then. They searched the other rooms. All were deserted.

"What does it mean?" Jacqueline couldn't hide her anxiety.

"Rest easy. We'll find out," Jess assured her. "This is what Jim had in mind when he made us memorize that map." The scout led the way into the street again.

The next house they tried was abandoned, too; the second was barred but they could get no answer. They were challenged from behind a bolted door at the third.

"Don Jaime Bowie sent us," Mars called.

This was password enough. The door opened for them; a candle was lighted once they were safely inside. Anselmo Bogarra was gray and withered. The skin was stretched too tight over his skull so that his eyes peered anxiously from hollowed sockets. "All night the troops have been moving," he said. "They will storm the Alamo tomorrow, I am sure."

"I've been thinkin' the same thing."

"There are five thousand of them now. What chance have we?"

"Thar's 'bout two hunderd men in the Alamo, maybe twenty o' them's still in the hospital. But thar's not a man thar don't know how to fight."

"I know," Bogarra replied simply. "My boy is there with Bowie."

Jess patted him awkwardly on the shoulder.

He told them what had happened to the Ruiz family. "Santa Anna's soldiers took the alcalde away last night. To prison likely, *quien sabe?* Later they came back and took the women to the Navarro house. They are prisoners there."

"Mrs. Hodges too?"

Bogarra nodded.

"Then we'll go thar."

"There will be a guard."

Jess nodded grimly, glanced at Jacqueline. "You'd best wait hyar."

"It's my mother we're hunting," was the stubborn answer. "I won't be in the way."

Jess didn't argue the point. There wasn't time.

They knew the place well. They scouted it cautiously and could see only one sentry before the door. "It's like Jim said," Jess decided. "The easiest way is the best way. He's not lookin' for Texians hyar. We'll walk straight by. Let me handle this, I know what to do."

They approached boldly. As they neared the sentry Jess lurched as if in his cups and stumbled against Mars. The watching guard eyed them tolerantly. They were abreast of him when Jess lurched again, bumped into the soldier. Before the man could cry out a knife had silenced him.

The door was unlocked.

"Mrs. Hodges," Mars called cautiously as he entered the darkened room.

"Who is it?" Sybil challenged.

"Mars Kirk. We've come to get you out of here."

Her fingers dug into his arm. "Is Jacqueline with you?"

"Yes. She's waiting outside. We had a time finding you, though. What happened here?"

"All known Texian sympathizers are under guard. Half the town's locked up. There's something big afoot."

"We've found that out. Come quickly, Mrs. Hodges, we've a lot to do."

He led her out, past the slain guard to where Jacqueline was waiting. Their reunion was interrupted by Jess.

"Jim's orders are to get you out o' hyar by sunup. Whar'll we find Camille?"

"At Santa Anna's headquarters." Sybil turned to Jacqueline. "They were married the night you left." Her voice turned flinty. "At least they called it a marriage."

"Can you tell us how to find the place?"

"I've been there. I can take you."

"That won't do. Too much risk. Thar's a heap o' difference between knockin' off one guard hyar an' traipsin' into an army headquarters, Mrs. Hodges."

"There's no other way," Sybil insisted. "Camille wouldn't listen to you. I must see her myself."

They argued, briefly. Remembering her last interview with her daughter, Sybil wouldn't yield. She was sure no one else could influence her. They considered it unwise to leave Jacqueline behind, alone. "When we leave there, it may be at a gallop," Mars declared.

"We're wastin' time." Jess finally gave in. "With Santy Anny concentratin' ev'ry man fer his attack, I reckon maybe 'tain't too risky. After all, his headquarters is the last place they'd look fer trouble."

The house they sought was in La Villita. As soon as he heard that, Jess led the way. They slipped noiselessly along the unpaved streets, avoiding the section near the river where they could hear the muffled sound of troops on the move. There were many men near the bridge. "Thar's a ford below," Jess reminded them. They waited on the bank there while the scout went off in search of horses. "Plenty o' cavalry 'round. I'll find some," he promised. "When we leave hyar we're apt to be in a mite of a hurry."

What he found was an officers' stable. The mounts he chose were good. In twenty minutes he returned, riding one, leading the others.

"No use tryin' to be quiet now," he advised as he helped Sybil into the saddle. "Take it easy an' follow me. Any horsemen hyar are apt to be officers an' ain't likely to be challenged. If we are, the rest of you wait while I ride up to the sentry. If anything goes wrong, don't wait fer me. Head south an' keep goin' till yo're clear of Santy Anny's outposts."

They rode into La Villita from the south without difficulty. There was no activity on this side of the village although, not far distant, they could hear the shuffle of moving troops. There were lights in the president's headquarters. Jess dismounted and went forward alone to reconnoiter. Presently they saw the candles go out, one by one.

Camille sat up in bed, frightened. There was someone in the room, she was sure. Earlier, there had been a great bustle in the adjoining chamber which Santa Anna used as an office. When that died down she had gone to sleep. She didn't know what had wakened her.

"That you, Camille?"

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" Use of her name had dispelled some of her panic.

"One o' Bowie's scouts, name o' Jess Leeman. Git on some clothes an' come with me. Yore ma's waitin' outside."

"What does she want?"

"She'll tell you. Git on some clothes. Thar's no time to waste."

"Wait outside," she directed. "I'll be with you in a minute."

Her mother here! What did it mean? Camille was eager to see her, and yet before she finished dressing she moved more slowly.

Jess led her to her mother. "Hyar she is, ma'am."

"We've come for you, Camille." Sybil sounded calm.

Camille kissed her mother, clung to her, wanted understanding and yet was afraid.

"We're wasting time, dear," said Sybil. "We must be miles away by daylight."

"Please try to understand, Mama. I don't want to go."

"You don't know what you're saying. Get on your horse."

"I know what you think but I know what I'm doing. I want to stay here."

Sybil tried to speak calmly. "No one can blame you for what happened, honey. You're hardly more than a child and Santa Anna tricked you with his talk of marriage. I understand better than you think but you're wrong to feel this way. Now come along. We'll talk this out later."

"But I've nothing to discuss. I knew you wouldn't understand. Don't you see? I'm married now. My place is with my husband."

"Your husband!" Sybil laughed but there was no mirth in the sound. "Santa Anna! I've told you he's already married. Why do you think Father Garza refused to perform the

ceremony? The alcalde is in jail for the same reason. He defied the president. They both know he's married."

"I don't believe it!" Camille stormed. "You're just trying to separate us because you hate him. I won't listen to these lies. We are married! I'm already his wife. My husband is the President of Mexico and I'm proud of it. Do you hear? Proud! Proud! Proud!"

Sybil gripped her by the shoulders then, shook her angrily. "Don't say that to me. You don't know what you're doing."

"I will say it. I'm Santa Anna's wife and I'm proud of it." She raised her voice defiantly. "Proud of it, do you hear? And I'm not leaving. You can't make me."

"Hush yore racket," Jess growled. "Do you want us all caught?"

Camille lowered her voice. There was a new note of confidence in it now. "That's it," she said. "Leave me alone or you'll all be caught. If I call out you'll be arrested and you'll never get away. Do you hear? Leave me alone. I know what I want."

Sybil stared at her in silent helplessness. From the distance toward the Alamo a rifle sounded, followed by a scattered volley. Hoarse shouts rose, cannon added to the din, first one, then several, deep-throated and angry.

"Hear that?" Sybil demanded harshly. "There's your Santa Anna, killing more Texians. Listen to the sound of it."

"He's my husband," was the stubborn retort. "I won't listen to any more of your lies. If you don't go and leave me alone I'll call for help. I'm warning you."

Sybil turned away, groped for her stirrup in the dark until Jess, sensing her trouble, lifted her into the saddle. "Let's go," she said dully. She didn't look back.

Jim Bowie, propped on his pallet, was staring out when the first shot gave its warning. All around the walls exhausted men slept. Travis had given permission for this when nothing disturbed the night's quiet. "Take turns," he urged, knowing their need for rest. "Half of you sleep while the others stand watch." He had posted three sentries outside

the walls to watch against surprise, but they had been trapped and bayoneted by the advancing army. An alert sentry's shot was the first warning. Almost instantly the garrison was awake, its musketry rattling into the packed ranks that surged toward the walls. The fire was accurate. By now the cannon were manned, their flame cutting swaths through the dense lines that struggled forward. It was dark still, but the gun flashes lighted up the scene fitfully.

Each man had his station. Travis stood by the gun in the northwest corner. Bonham was on the dirt ramp in the church where the guns fired in three directions; Crockett and his Tennesseans were at the stockade which linked chapel and fortress.

The attack faltered, eddied like leaves swirling on the surface of a stream's backwash as the volleys tore at it, then struggled on. At the southeast corner it reached Crockett's palisade. There was hand-to-hand fighting here briefly before the enemy was driven back.

The first attack had failed. Santa Anna had lost the advantage of surprise.

Bowie, alone and helpless, listened to the din and followed the battle's course by it. He knew the tide of the assault had ebbed before Sam came to tell him.

"We's whupped 'em! We's whupped 'em!" the boy shouted.

"Go back to your post," Jim ordered. "This is only the beginning."

The young Negro was not a combatant. His task was to pass powder up to the platform of one of the big guns in the plaza.

The respite was brief. On all four sides the storming columns were re-forming. Their commander wanted to finish the task before dawn. It was turning gray now, however; the black masses made good targets. Every cannon rumbled —the time for hoarding ammunition was past. Sometimes, through the battle's roar Santa Anna's band could be heard, stationed at the bridge, blaring its butcher's song: *"Degüello."* It was a tune which had its origin in the mystic past

Spain's Moorish wars. It meant "Throat cutting" and signified "no quarter."

This time the northern column had the greatest success. It gained a temporary foothold in the breached wall. Colonel Duque, its commander, died on that pile of rubble. After he fell, his men were driven back bloodily. On the west a few scaling ladders had been planted against the walls. The enemy couldn't gain a foothold there, either. As fast as men swarmed up them they were tossed back. This was grim fighting. It was gun butt and Bowie knife against bayonet. The wall turned slippery and red. Gradually this attack yielded too. All four columns fell back sullenly. It had lasted longer than the first. It was more than an hour before the last troops straggled back from the smoking walls.

The defenders took heart. Two full-scale assaults had been repelled. Santa Anna's entire army had been engaged and paid a heavy price, too, for its effort. The fortress was surrounded by a litter of bodies, sodden dark bundles, sprawled in the grotesque attitudes of death. The cost had been heavy inside, too, but there was no time to count that now.

Travis took what steps he could to meet the next attack. His lines were intact everywhere but the garrison, pitifully meager at the start, was weaker now. There were no reserves to fill up the gaps. He was able to concentrate a few more men at the danger points only by thinning his lines elsewhere. The other assaults had been launched without preparatory fire. Santa Anna had depended on surprise and sheer weight of numbers. This time it was different. The Texians crouched behind their walls and listened to the wail of flying metal overhead. It had the moan of a high and vicious gale, thin and sharp against the bass growl of musketry. The women and children were sheltered in the chapel. Travis wanted them as far removed from this as possible.

The magazine was located in a north room of the church. Bowie had chosen its site before he was injured. "About the safest place we can find," he'd said. "We don't want a chance shot blowing up our powder."

Travis was thinking of these supplies as he peered toward the gathering enemy, watched their lines re-form. There was

no longer any attempt at concealment. It would have been useless. It was broad daylight now; the fight was in its third hour. "They're coming again, Bob," he told Major Evans.

"Then we'll drive 'em back again," growled the major.

"While we last." Travis had a grim set to his chin as he gazed down the scantily manned wall. "One thing I want you to promise me. If they do get over the walls——"

"Then they'll really have a fight on their hands."

"I know. It's just that there are so damned many of them. If they keep on coming like this we can't last forever. I want the magazine blown up right at the very last, after it becomes obvious we're through. That way we'll make a clean job of it."

Evans' grip tightened on his rifle. "They're not in here yet."

"I know. But just in case—whichever one of us is left will blow up the ammunition right at the last."

"All right."

On the north Castrillon had taken command after Duque's death and was re-forming the broken ranks. He had halted the reeling columns on the east and west as well. They had been badly disorganized in the last attack. He had restored order and merged the scattered forces into one overwhelming unit. There were almost four thousand men in this force, which he held poised like a hammer to batter against the broken north wall. A trench had been built in the ruins of that breach. Thirty Texians huddled there, waiting.

Cos had reinforcements on the south, too. Santa Anna poured in his reserves there. This was where the third attack developed first. It was determined. Cos tried hard, closed up the gaps of broken companies from the rear. They were advancing against the best marksmen of the frontier. Each time a rifle snarled a man fell. There was grapeshot in the cannon. They plowed red furrows through the massed battalions. Again Cos failed. His men fell back.

Castrillon moved from the north at the sound of Cos's advance. The first ranks went down under the cannon's battering. He drove them on. As fast as one rank faltered another took its place. His losses were terrible, but he had the

combined strength of three columns here and poured them against the weakened position. As his lines neared the Alamo the Texian cannon were useless. On their platforms behind the walls they could not be deflected enough to fire here. The attack picked up momentum. Once rid of that leaden scourge, it swarmed over the rubble heap at the northeast corner. Here the thin Texian line held as long as men were left to defend it. Then, like a crimson flood, the battle surged on. Travis turned his gun inward and knocked the chocks from under it so he could aim down at the dense ranks inside the plaza. Its grapeshot left a wide red scar there. Then he fell, a bullet through his forehead, and the gun was silenced.

The character of the battle changed swiftly. Castrillon had three thousand men inside the walls. The Texians turned their rifles inward. Each building became an island of resistance. When Crockett, from his position defending the church palisade, saw what had happened he raced across the plaza with a handful of men and manned the big gun near the southwest corner. Following the tactics Travis had used, he turned the gun around. Three times they fired it point-blank into the advancing throng. Against the sullen roar of battle rose the screams of the mangled. From every window and door rifles added their fire. The plaza was turned into a place of torture for Castrillon's writhing column. Far worse than its din was the stench of this shambles, the acrid bite of burned powder, sweat, the sick-sweet slaughter-pen odor of gushing blood. In places the plaza was knee-deep in dead. When his gun finally was engulfed Crockett went down defending it with his clubbed rifle.

Cos came storming back now. The garrison, too preoccupied by the foe within, was unable to check his fourth effort. He broke through. Colonel Washington died at the palisade, trying futilely to check this breach.

The Texians had no artillery left but their rifles still were vicious, snarling from every building. For the army that had battered its way inside the walls, this was the costliest part of the attack. Again and again they stormed the Long Barracks. Each time that accurate fire drove them back. There

were windrows of dead along the building's bullet-pocked face where more than a thousand men fell.

Cannon finally were brought up and used to splinter each door at point-blank range. A bayonet charge followed each blast as the artillery cleared the way. The battle was fought from room to room now. Even the hospital on the second floor of the Long Barracks was converted into a fort. Invalids, too weak to stand, fired from their beds until the bloody bayonets reached them. They knew what to expect. Every man, sick or well, fought to the last. Bonham fell at his guns. Near the end, Major Bob Evans remembered his promise to Travis and tried to reach the magazine. A bullet felled him.

The hoarse roar of battle broke up into scattered islands of lesser sound as the nature of the conflict changed. Gradually these were stilled, one by one. Jim Bowie knew what was coming. He was propped up on his tilted cot, waiting, two primed pistols in his lap, his unsheathed knife beside them. The fighting was near its end when they found him. He was tempted to rise, but, knowing his weakness, husbanded his strength for a final effort. He was thinking of Jacqueline and Sybil.

This will give them a chance, he thought. Who will notice them now?

When they battered in the door, he was ready. His pistols brought down the first two. Then they rushed him with their bayonets but he didn't wait. He'd been hoarding his energy for this moment. He leaped up, knife in hand, swept a musket aside, and used a surprised soldier to prop himself up as his blade swung in a dangerous arc.

He died there alone but around him were the bodies of his enemies.

They rode hard, Jess leading the way, Sybil alone by preference, Jacqueline and Mars side by side. There was a glare in the sky behind them to match the battle's roar. Each knew what it meant.

"I wish I was thar," Jess said once. "Five thousand agin a handful. They need ev'ry rifle."

Sybil looked back. It was daylight now and there was

smoke in the sky where the glow had been. "One rifle or two couldn't make any difference, Jess," she said. "Where was Fannin? Where were the others?"

Mars was looking back, too. Hours had passed since the battle had started and they had been riding steadily; they were too far to hear musketry and the cannons were silent now. "I don't hear anything."

"I'm afeerd thar's nothin' to hyar," said Jess.

They stopped their horses and stared back the way they had come where the silence was more ominous than the early roar had been.

"It can't be. Jim Bowie never lost a fight." Sybil's voice lacked the confidence of her words. Her face was white.

"He sent you a message, Mother." Jacqueline remembered her recent parting. "He said to tell you he wanted to come himself."

"He wanted me to know that?"

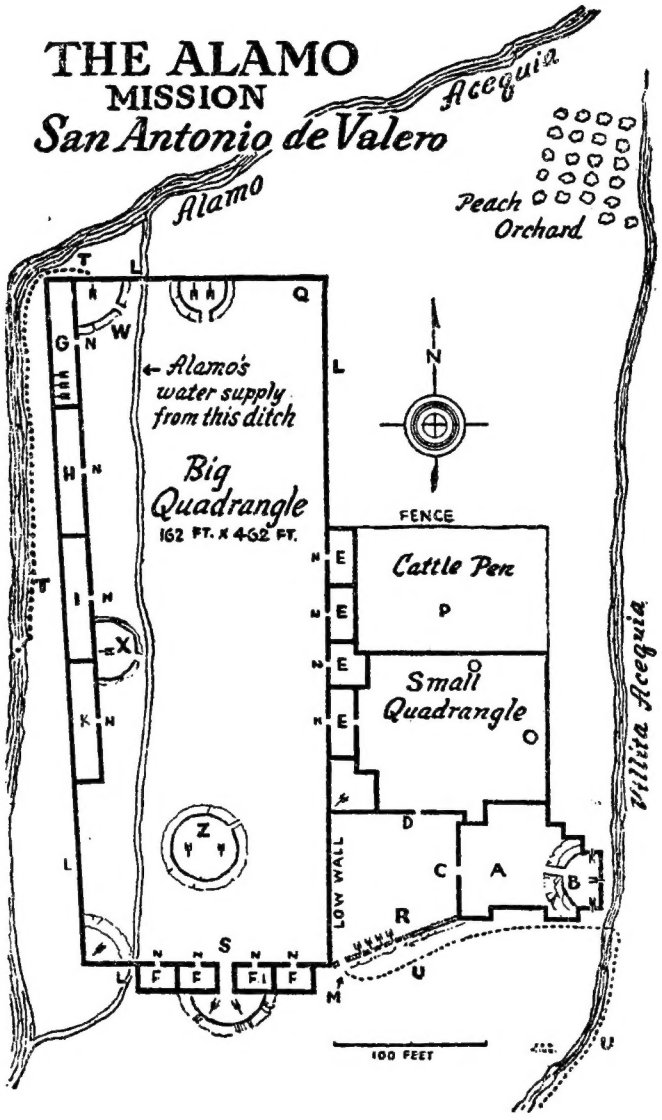
"Yes, and there was something more. He wanted you to know that he understood."

Sybil could no longer see the dread black pall that hung over the Alamo. It was shut out by her tears.

THE END

# KEY TO THE MAP OF THE ALAMO MISSION

| | |
|---|---|
| **A** | Old Chapel |
| **B** | Cannon emplacement |
| **C** | Chapel entrance |
| **D** | Old wall connecting Alamo fortifications and old Chapel—above is old cloister |
| **E** | Long Barracks—here bitterest fighting took place at last |
| **F** | South Barracks. Bowie died in room F-1 |
| **G–H–I–K** | West Barracks. One story, guns on roof |
| **L** | Outer Walls—9′ to 12′ high; about 3′ thick |
| **M** | Gate used during siege |
| **N** | Barrack doors—where late fighting centered |
| **O** | Walls of small Quadrangle—in ruins then |
| **P** | Cattle pen—brush fence on North & East |
| **Q** | Walls damaged—breach finally made here |
| **R** | Stockade—double row of vertical logs—ditch along its face |
| **S** | Main gate |
| **T** | Henri Bertin's route out |
| **U** | Jacquelin's path in |
| **W–X–Z** | Cannon parapets |
| **W** | Travis died here |
| **Z** | Bowie injured here |
| **Z** | Crockett died here |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